NATION

Huge security at borders to stop farmers' 'Delhi Chalo'

>> Page: 4 <<

BUSINESS

SpiceJet plans to lay off 1.4K people

>> Page: 7 <<

SPORTS

KL Rahul ruled out of third Test, Padikkal gets a call

>> Page: 8 <<

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in www.magzter.com 13 FEBRUARY 2024 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 3 SHA BAN, 1445 AH Vol 4 | Issue No 38 | Pages: 8

Packaged mid-day meals making kids sick

BENGALURU, 10 FEB

After being served home cooked mid-day meals for years, students in the State are now being fed ready-to-mix packaged food. The change in meals has led to compromise on the food's nutritional content leading to adverse health issues in children. Many students have reportedly experienced stomach aches and nausea after consuming the meals. The State government updated its mid-day meals menu in December, replacing home cooked food with processed mix. Salar News does a reality check on the packaged meals.

>>>See Page 2

Nitish led NDA govt wins trust vote in Bihar, Speaker out

NDA gets 129 votes as Oppn walks out amid 'Jai Shree Ram' chants

PATNA, 12 FEB

National Democratic Alliance government in Bihar, led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on Monday won the trust vote in the state assembly, with 129 MLAs voting in favour of the motion. This was amid a walkout by all non-NDA members.

Earlier, the House passed a resolution for the removal of Awadh Bihari Chaudhary who belongs to the RJD, but had refused to resign after the party lost power, and a no-confidence motion was moved against him by the NDA.

Altogether, 129 legislators voted in favour of the motion, but Kumar rose to suggest that the vote of Deputy Speaker Maheshwar Hazari, who belongs to the JD(U), also be counted.

Usually, the person in the Chair does not take part in voting, unless there is a tie.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with NDA MLAs at Bihar Legislative Assembly in Patna on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

The NDA, comprising the JD(U), BJP, former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM and an Independent, had a combined strength of 128 in the 243-strong assembly. However, it received a shot in the arm with three RJD MLAs Prahlad Yadav, Chetan Anand and Neelam Devi walking over to the ruling side.

BJP MLAs, who were elated at the party's return to power after a gap of nearly 17 months, erupted in chants of Jai Shree Ram' as the trust vote was won by the chief minister, who spoke for nearly 30 minutes, venting spleen against erstwhile allies RJD and Congress as also the Opposition INDIA bloc, which he had helped form.

- According to NDA sources, some MLAs of the JD(U)-BJP combine had not reached the House when the motion was taken up. They were, however, present during the trust vote.

RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, taunted him with the remark "what is the guarantee that Kumar will not do a flip-flop yet again?".

"I had warned the Congress that things were not going well (in INDIA bloc). Some people were having problems with me occupying the centre-stage. Even Lalu Prasad seemed to have joined my detractors," alleged Kumar, who was seen as a contender for the post of a convenor or the prime ministerial candidate of the opposition coalition. A point of order was raised by Yadav when he saw the three MLAs of his party sitting on the ruling side's bench.

All the three members voted along with the NDA in favour of the no-confidence motion, which was supported by 125 MLAs and opposed by 112.

According to NDA sources, some MLAs of the JD(U)-BJP combine had not reached the House when the motion was taken up. They were, however, present during the trust vote. Election of the new Speaker is now likely to take place on Tuesday, as the day's proceedings were adjourned after the trust vote, which concluded late in the afternoon, with no breaks in between.

—PTI

>>>More on Page 3

PM to visit UAE to inaugurate first Hindu temple

NEW DELHI, 10 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) beginning Tuesday during which he will hold wide-ranging talks with President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and inaugurate the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi.It would be the prime minister's seventh visit to the UAE since 2015, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Saturday, announcing the trip.Modi and Al Nahyan will discuss ways to further deepen, expand and strengthen the strategic partnership between the countries and exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, it said. *—PTI*

B'luru to host K'taka's oldest classical music fest

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

One of the oldest Indian classical music festivals being held in Chamarajapet of Bengaluru, Ramanavami Global Music Festival, started way back in 1939, came about because the organiser saved Rs 4 from the money that he collected from his neighbours to celebrate Holi. The Sree Ramaseva Mandali's 86th Ramanavami Global Music Festival, to be held between 9 April and 10 May. The festival went on to become an iconic event of Karnataka, patronised by the then Maharaja of Mysore, Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, and was later inaugurated by the likes of the last Governor-General of India, C Rajagopalachari and the first Vice-President of independent India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, said SN Varadaraj, general secretary and managing trustee of Sree Ramaseva Mandali.*—PTI*

NATION ELATED

Qatar releases ex-Indian Navy personnel

Ex-Indian navay men, who were handed death row in Qatar, arrive in New Delhi following their release on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Congress on Monday welcomed the release of eight former Indian naval personnel by Qatar, even as the party accused the government of failing to act on time and letting the situation become serious.

Qatar has released eight jailed former Indian Navy personnel and seven of them returned home early Monday, 46 days after their death sentences handed last October were commuted to jail terms of varying duration.

The eight apparently faced charges of espionage but neither Qatari authorities nor New Delhi made the charges against them public. The Navy veterans were on 26 October last year given death sentences by Qatar's Court of First Instance in a case of suspected espionage.

In a post on 'X', Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The Indian National Congress joins the entire nation in its relief and happiness that the eight former Indian Navy personnel earlier sentenced to death by a court in Qatar have been released and are back home."

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said the eight people who have been released should not have been sent to jail in the first place.

Congress MPs had also raised the issue in Parliament but the government ignored it, she alleged. The Court of Appeal in the Gulf nation on 28 December last year commuted the capital punishment of the eight Navy veterans and sentenced them to jail terms for varying durations.

The Indian nationals, who worked with the private company Al Dahra, were arrested in August 2022. *—PTI*

RLD allies with BJP after Ratna to Charan

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) leader Jayant Singh on Monday said the decision to go with the NDA was taken after consulting his party MLAs and workers after the Bharat Ratna was announced for his grandfather Chaudhary Charan Singh.

Asked if party MLAs were upset with the RLD joining the NDA, Singh said, "If someone is reporting that, I don't think they have talked to the MLAs. I talked to MLAs and workers and made a decision after that. There was no planning; we were forced to make a decision in a short time due to the circumstances."

Though Singh and the BJP have made no formal announcement, both sides gave ample hints about the RLD switching from the INDIA bloc to the NDA since Friday, when Charan Singh was named for the highest civilian award.

"We have good intentions for our people and country. When Bharat Ratna has been given we are very happy. It is not limited to our family or party. It is an honour for every farmer, youth, poor," Singh said at the sidelines of an event to mark the birth anniversary of his father Ajit Singh.

Asked when he will announce his alliance with the BJP, he evaded a direct reply, and said, "Today is a momentous occasion, we are celebrating".

"Dil Jeet Liya" (You have won our hearts)," Singh had posted on X after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the Bharat Ratna for Charan Singh.

Singh also slammed critics for saying it was part of a deal to switch towards the NDA, saying such remarks belittle the former prime minister's legacy. *—PTI*

BJP SECURES NANDED SEAT

After Deora & Siddique, ex-CM Ashok Chavan quits Congress

MUMBAI, 12 FEB

In a setback to Congress ahead of Lok Sabha polls, former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan resigned from the grand old party on Monday, amid speculation that he may join the BJP.

Chavan's exit from Congress came days after senior Maharashtra Congress leaders Baba Siddique and Milind Deora quit the party.

There was no confirmation either from Chavan or the BJP on reports that the 65-year-old leader will be fielded for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections.

Amid the buzz that Chavan will join the BJP, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters, "Aagey aagey dekho hota hai kya" (wait and watch what happens.

Ashok Chavan **PHOTO: PTI**

Independent MLA from Amravati, Ravi Rana, claimed 10 to 15 MLAs are in touch with Ashok Chavan. Chavan said the decision to quit the Congress was a personal one, adding he will announce his next course of action in a day or two.

"I have not yet made any decision to join BJP," he added.

Chavan, MLA from the Bhokar seat, was also a member of the Congress Working Committee. He was also a former MP from Nanded Lok Sabha constituency.

With Chavan quitting, BJP seems to have secured its Nanded Lok Sabha seat for Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking to reporters, Chavan said, "I am not going to discuss anything happening in the Congress party on a public forum."

Chavan also refuted claims that the white paper tabled in Parliament prompted him to resign from Congress. The white paper has mentioned the Adarsh Building scam, pertaining to a housing society in Mumbai, due to which Chavan had to step down as the chief minister of Maharashtra in 2010.

Prithviraj Chavan said voters will teach a lesson to deserters. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Will make Ramanagara a model district: DKS

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday said Ramanagara would be developed as a model district. "MP DK Suresh is determined to make Ramanagara district an example to emulate. We are making Bidadi Planning Authority into Greater Bengaluru Planning Authority and we are also preparing a DPR for extending the metro to Bidadi," Shivakumar said here after flagging off 25 new Ashwamedha buses to Ramanagara.

"Kengal Hanumanthaiah, Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji and Sri Shivakumara Swamiji are all from the same district. We are all part of Bengaluru," he said.

"In Tamil Nadu, free bus travel was introduced only in the corporation limits but our government has allowed free bus travel throughout the State. The Shakthi scheme has helped women save money," he said.

The KPCC President said the government is planning to introduce 1,000 new buses to plug the shortage. Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy is bringing in a lot of changes in the department. About the comments of the BJP leaders that the government has made the Governor speak lies, he asked, "Is the government giving Rs 2,000 to the women head of the house a lie? Is the government giving free bus travel a lie?" *—Salar News*

6 arrested for raping Koppal woman, assaulting her husband

KOPPAL, 12 FEB

A 21-year-old woman was allegedly raped, and her husband was beaten up by six men in Gangavati area in this district, police said on Monday.

All the accused have been arrested in connection with the incident that occurred on intervening night of 8 and 9 February, they said. According to the police, the woman and her husband were waiting at the bus stop to head home. The couple engaged in in a quarrel over a domestic dispute. As the argument intensified, a group of six men intervened and started quarrelling with the man. Thereafter, they started thrashing the victim's husband. In her complaint on 9 February , the woman alleged that they dragged her and thrashed her husband. One of the accused allegedly raped her. They also harassed her, a senior police officer said. "We have registered a case based on the statement of the victim and arrested all the six men involved in the incident on 9 February itself," he said. *—PTI*

GUV HAILS 'GUARANTEES'

'Cong pulled 1.2cr families out of poverty'

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Monday hailed Karnataka government's guarantee schemes. He said more than 1.2 crore families are coming out of the poverty line and rising to the middle class status because of them.

In his customary address to both Houses of Legislature at the beginning of the Budget session, he also said Karnataka gets less in terms of tax share, despite being ranked second among the states that collect highest tax in the country, remarks seen as the Congress' dig at the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre.

BJP legislators were seen wearing saffron shawls during the proceedings and shouted "Jai Sri Ram", "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" slogans at the end of the Governor's speech. Congress leaders retaliated by shouting 'Jai Bhim'.

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot joint session of the Karnataka legislature on Monday in Bengaluru's Vidhana Soudha; BJP legislators wore saffron shawls to the session **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

"It is a global record that more than five crore people of the State will be promoted to middle class status by this one decision (guarantee schemes) of my Government," Gehlot said.

Karnataka's guarantee schemes are a model for the country, he said, adding that other governments are competing to adopt them.

Gehlot also said domestic and foreign investment is flowing into the State in a big way. In the last eight months, investment of more than Rs 77,000 crore has come into the State.

The government is ready to implement more pro-people schemes, the Governor said. However, not enough resources are available from various sources. Responding to the BJP leaders wearing orange shawls to the Assembly, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "Religion should be a part of politics, politics should not be religion. Let them wear black or orange, all we care is about the welfare of the State." *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

K'taka ryots on way to Delhi detained in MP

BHOPAL, 12 FEB

At least 70 farmers travelling from Karnataka for the 'Delhi Chalo' protest march were detained by the government railway police (GRP) at Bhopal railway station in Madhya Pradesh in the wee hours of Monday, an official said.

According to eyewitnesses, the farmers staged a protest and raised slogans after they were forced to alight from a Delhi-bound train and not allowed to travel further.

The farmers were deboarded from a Sampark Kranti Express train in the early hours of the day and handed over to the district authorities, the official from the GRP said.

"A total of 70 farmers were detained by the police at Bhopal railway station around 3am, following which we staged a protest," farmers leader and Dharwad Zila secretary Parshuram Etingudd told PTI. The group was travelling to Delhi to take part in the farmers' agitation, he said.

The farmers were deboarded from a Sampark Kranti Express train in the early hours of the day **PHOTO: PTI**

One of the women protestors also sustained injuries in the police action, Etingudd claimed and alleged that the group was detained in a place outside the railway station and was not provided facilities such as hot water, especially for those having medical issues.

Several farmer associations, mostly from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, have called for a march on 13 February to demand a law guaranteeing MSP for their produce, one of the conditions they had set when they agreed to withdraw their agitation in 2021. *—PTI*

Sec 144 in Delhi for a month

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Delhi Police has imposed Section 144 across the national capital in view of widespread tension and 'social unrest' due to the farmers' Delhi Chalo March on Tuesday. The order will be in place for a month. The order prohibited any type of rally or procession and blocking of roads and passages. The order has banned tractor rallies.*—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

PHOTO: PTI

Will start campaign to drive out Congress: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Opposition Leader R Ashoka on Monday said BJP will start a movement to drive out the Congress government from power. "We will ensure that the Congress government is shunted out from the House as well as the ground," Ashoka said. He said the government had instigated the Governor to lie during his speech in the Assembly on Monday. "Congress has portrayed the schemes brought by the previous BJP government and the schemes of the Central government as their schemes," he said. About State Contractors' Association President D Kempanna's claim that the government is robbing away 40 per cent commission in tenders. "The sameKempanna, who was labelled Satya Harischandra by Siddaramaiah, is now making claims against him," he said. He also said the government is cheating farmers of the State.—*Salar News*

Ramanagara gets 100 Ashwamedha buses

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Monday inaugurated 100 new Ashwamedha buses in Ramanagara to increase the connectivity to other districts. Speaking at the inauguration Shivakumar said that people from other districts are spending Rs 1500-2000 on travel to visit Bengaluru. "We are trying to increase the fleet of government buses and the implementation of Shakti scheme to reduce the burden on the people," Shivakumar said. Showering praises on Ramalinga Reddy, Shivakumar said, "As a Minister, he is bringing a revolutionary change in the transport department."Member of Parliament DK Suresh was also present at the event. —*Salar News*

Lokayukta conducts raids at Kolar taluk office

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Lokayukta officials conducted raids at the Kolar taluk office following public complaints, uncovering alleged bribery practices. Tahsildar Harshavardhan's office was scrutinised, with complaints alleging that no work could be done without paying bribes. Meanwhile, in Davanagere, a village administrative officer, Ganesh KG, was caught red-handed by the Lokayukta while accepting a bribe from differently-abled individuals. He had demanded a bribe of Rs 6,000 for issuing a disability certificate and was apprehended while accepting Rs 5,000 —*Salar News*

JD(S) MLA's son assaults constable, booked

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

An FIR has been registered against the son of Devadurga JD(S) MLA Karemma Nayak and seven others for allegedly assaulting an on-duty police constable for stopping a tractor transporting sand, police said on Monday. The incident happened on Sunday when constable Hanumantaraya, who is posted at Devadurga police station, stopped a tractor carrying sand suspecting its involvement in illegal mining and took the vehicle and its driver to the police station for a probe, they said. According to the police, the constable later got a call from the MLA's son, Santhosh, asking him for a meeting at the Inspection Bungalow. After he reached there, he was assaulted by a group of people who thrashed him and did not even allow him to speak. The injured constable is being treated for his injuries.—*PTI*

Packaged mid-day meals making kids sick

Packaged meals have compromised the food's nutritional content, leading to health issues in children

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 12 FEB

After being served cooked mid-day meals for years, students in the State are now being fed ready-to-mix packaged food.The change in meals has led to compromise in the food's nutritional content leading to adverse health issues in children. Many students have reportedly experienced stomach aches and nausea after consuming the meals. The bland taste of the food is forcing the students to skip the meals regularly.

The State government updated its mid-day meals menu in December, replacing home cooked food with processed mix.Though the State's budget allocation for mid-day meals has been increasing for the past three years, Women and Child Department officials claim it has been reduced. (See box 1)With Centre claiming they have provided enough funds and the State saying they are broke, the children in anganwadis are caught in the crosshairs.

Ashok, a 12-year-old student from a City government school, said he and his friends don't enjoy their meals anymore. "I don't want to have this (ready mix meal). It makes me vomit every day. I want to eat rice, sambar, and pongal again," he said. Another student said he prefers to eat bread and jam over the packaged meal.

An anganwadi worker told **Salar News** that earlier when the bell rang at 10.30 am, children would rush to grab milk. But now, students express disappointment and say 'ayy banro, bili neer kudiyona' (come let's drink the white water together).

State government updated mid-day meals menu in December, replacing cooked food with processed mix **PHOTO:PTI**

Meanwhile, Lakshmi, an anganwadi cook from the City, said now it takes only 30 minutes to prepare the packaged food. It involves mixing protein powder with hot water, and boiling ready-made kichdi mix (containing rice, oil and spices) for 15 minutes.

When **Salar News** reached out to anganwadi workers in Chikkaballapur, Tumakuru, Shivamogga, Uttara and Dakshina Kannada, they said the students are facing the same issues.Anganwadi workers are left with no choice but to purchase eggs and other supplies from their own funds. "I bought eggs for the students from my money when I noticed they weren't eating the given meals. Without oil and green leafy vegetables, how can the food taste good? They have provided milk but no sugar or jaggery to go with it," she said. She also claims ready-mix pack has a foul smell when opened.

Each centre gets eight packets of protein powder, millet ladoo and 25 packets of kichdi which lasts for a month for approximately 25 students.**Salar News** reached out to the Health, Education, and Women and Child Development Ministries for comment, but did not receive a response. However, a source from the Women and Child Development Department said that a letter has been submitted to the Education Minister requesting a change in the menu. Additionally, the department is considering discontinuing the packed food after the State Budget. Meanwhile, child activists are flagging concern over the impact of the packaged food on children's health. They question who will be held accountable if students fall ill.

Nagasimha Rao, a child rights activist, said nutritious food is essential for development in children and the government should stop experimenting with children's diets.

Varalakshmi, State President of Centre of Indian Trade Unions that looks after anganwadi workers, flagged the lack of clarity regarding the packed food. "On 23 January, the government informed us that we would have a meeting regarding the packed food. However, when we asked why anganwadis are receiving packed food, they mentioned it was a decision of High Court and promised to provide us with a copy of the decision. Two months have passed, and we have not received any copy." —*Salar News*

Budget allocation for mid-day meals

• 2022-2023	₹**960** crore
• 2021- 2022	₹**790** crore
• From 2020-2021	₹**515** crore

Source: PRS legislative research

THE PACKAGED FOOD

Protein powder

Readymade kichdi rice and masala

Millet ladoo powder

Sambar masala

PLIGHT OF ANGANWADI WORKERS

- Milk supply stopped due to non-payment by the government
- 5-6 Anganwadi centres shut as government has not paid rents for months
- Since 2018, no anganwadi workers have been hired
- Anganwadi workers have not been paid salary for months too
- Anganwadi workers are paying for maintenance of centres too

MEALS THEN AND NOW

Time	Menu Before	Menu now
10.30 am	Cow's milk	Milk powder or protein mix
1.30 pm	Rice with dal or vegetable sambar and kara pongal	Ready-mix kichdi and Sambar
	Ingredients: Vegetables, sprouts, oil, coriander leaves, dal, chilli powder, salt, sugar, egg and chikki	Ingredients: ready-made sambar powder, milk powder dal, salt kichdi mix
3.30 pm	Sprouts masala with green grams, black chickpea	None
Saturday special	Chikki and lemon rice	Chikki with only limited anganwadi centre. The rest is replaced with milk and ready-made kichdi

Nutrients	Nutrition in normal meal per student	Nutrition in one packaged meal for 25 students
Energy	450 calories	385 calories
Protein	2 grams	11.15
Oil and fat	5 grams	4.0 grams
Vitamin A	500 Avg mcg	190.48 mcg

CM defends Rajan over BJP's tax allegations

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah slammed the BJP for alleging that former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan influenced the reduction in Karnataka's tax share. Siddaramaiah called the claims "unfounded" and "misleading". Rajan is a prospected Congress candidate for Rajya Sabha from the state."It is disheartening to witness the extent to which BY Vijayendra and BJP leaders are willing to forsake the heart and soul of Kannadiga pride, all for winning approval from BJP high command. It is in the DNA of BJP to spread fake news," he said.

Raghuram Rajan **PHOTO: PTI**

State BJP President Vijayendra claimed that the Rajan committee influenced the Finance Commission regarding the State's share of tax.

Siddaramaiah said the committee's responsibilities were to identify backward states and ensure equitable allocation of developmental funds. The committee's report states that the framework should be used with existing methodologies, including that of the Finance Commission's recommendations for a fair share of tax devolution.

"It is also important to note that the Finance Commission, which is mandated to determine the distribution of tax revenues between the Centre and the states, operates independently of the committee," Siddaramaiah said.He said that subsequently 14th Finance Commission report (submitted on 15 December, 2014), which came after the committee's recommendations (submitted in September 2013), proposed an increase in the devolution of taxes to Karnataka, from 4.328 per cent in the 13th Finance Commission to 4.713 per cent in the 14th Finance Commission. —*Salar News*

Price hike shocks alcohol consumers, beer sales drop

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Amidst fiscal deliberations aimed at shoring up state coffers, the Karnataka government's decision to increase the price of beer has sent shockwaves through the alcoholic beverage market. Effective from February 1, the government raised the Additional Excise Duty on beer from 185 per cent to 195 per cent, marking a ten percent hike. Consequently, the retail price of each bottle of beer surged by Rs 8 to Rs 15, prompting a swift and palpable decline in beer sales state wide.

Lamenting the government's relentless pursuit of revenue generation through repeated price hikes, liquor enthusiasts bemoan the escalating financial burden imposed on their pastime. Despite a stark decline in beer sales, the government anticipates a boost in revenue through enhanced taxation. However, industry insiders caution that such measures risk stifling consumer demand and eroding business viability.Last year, 56.62 lakh litres (7.26 lakh boxes) of beer were sold in the seven days from February 1 to 7. This year, 50.38 lakh litres (6.46 lakh boxes) of beer have been sold. Compared to the previous year, the sale of beer has decreased by 6.24 lakh litres in the last seven days. As the sale of beer in bars and restaurants and retail liquor shops has declined, the purchase demand (Purchase Indent) submitted for beer to the State Beverage Corporation has also decreased. There is not much fluctuation in the sales of Indian made liquor.Premium beer brands, once favoured by connoisseurs, have been supplanted by lower-priced alternatives, reflecting a broader trend towards economizing amidst financial constraints. The recent price hike represents the third increment in beer prices since the advent of Congress-led government following the State Assembly elections. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

- The recent hike represents the third increment in beer prices since the advent of Congress-government following the State Assembly elections

IN SESSION

Guv attacks Centre over no drought relief

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Monday attacked the Centre for not releasing compensation funds for drought-hit Karnataka. He said the State government has submitted memorandums related to drought relief to the Centre seeking financial assistance of Rs 18,171.44 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund for drought relief measures.

"Till now, no amount has been released. The State Government is making all necessary efforts to release drought relief urgently to alleviate the sufferings of the people," he said during his customary address to both Houses of Legislature at the beginning of the Budget session.He said a large part of the State is facing severe drought conditions, Karnataka has declared drought in 223 taluks out of 240 during Kharif 2023, of which 196 taluks are categorised as severely drought affected. Rs 324 crore was released to 31 districts for immediate drought relief measures like availability of drinking water and fodder. Response Fund guidelines, State has disbursed input subsidy of Rs 617 crore to 32.50 lakh drought affected farmers as first instalment of crop damage compensation up to Rs 2,000 as per eligibility, he added.

Speaking on Kannada pride, Governor said, "survival and growth of Kannada language is a matter of life and death for us. We will not tolerate any attack on our language and culture."He said the State-Level Single Window Clearance Committee has approved 165 investment projects, wherein Rs 45,325 crore investments will be made; they will create employment opportunities to 42,292 people.

He also pointed out that the government has decided in principle to establish 100 new Village Courts in the state as part of the aim to bring justice to the doorstep of rural people. Government is devising a new education policy to equip the youth to embrace opportunities the Governor said.Further noting that to facilitate regional rapid transit and connectivity in Karnataka, operations of Shivamogga Airport commenced from August 31, 2023, Gehlot said Vijayapura airport will be completed and made operational in 2024. Hassan and Raichur airport construction work will be completed within the stipulated time, he added.

Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy slammed the Governor and said, "The guarantees announced by Congress have taken over the media. The Governor appreciated the government for launching a guarantee model for the entire state but he did not talk about the people who have not received the schemes," said JDS leader.

He added, "They have no money to compensate the drought-affected farmers. However, crores of rupees are being spent on providing cabinet ranks to random people. Deputy Chief Minister's doctor is also getting cabinet rank." He also attacked the Governor for not talking about the Kantharaju caste report that the government is yet to accept. —*Salar News with PTI*

Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot was welcomed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Assembly Speaker UT Khader and others at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Monday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Survival and growth of Kannada language is a matter of life and death for us. We will not tolerate any attack on our language and culture.

-Thaawarchand Gehlot, Governor

OUTCRY OVER MISALLOCATION OF FUNDS

RAICHUR, 12 FEB

The crop insurance compensation amount of farmer Vani, daughter of Minor Irrigation, Science, and Technology Minister NS Bosaraju allegedly being remitted to others' accounts at Bhogavathi taluk.

The entire incident triggered outcry and demands for accountability.Vani said she had been paying an amount of Rs 5,046.31 as an insurance premium for her seven acres and 10 guntas of land in Bhogavathi. However, the compensation amount totalling ₹1,01,180 was reportedly deposited into the account of Sharangowda Doddabasa vanagowda Patil. Additionally, a further ₹1,11,374.6 designated for another plot in Vani's name found its way into Lakshmidevi Gaudappa's bank account. —*Salar News*

FLOWER BUSINESS BOOMS

Roses get pricey as romantics get set for V-Day

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Owing to the increase in production of roses in Hosur in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, it has in a way paved way for the rise in prices of the flowers. Each stem of roses now costsup to Rs 50-70 depending on the sizes. This year a bunch of 20 roses will be costing around Rs. 160-170. The flowers which are in demand most from Hosur are the Taj Mahal Rose, Kohinoor roses, Damask rose, and even Chrysanthemums.Taj Roses are known for their bright red in colour.On Valentine's Day, a bunch of 20 flowers is being sold for Rs 800, with each long-stem rose retailing at Rs 60, which is double the average price.

Each stem of roses now costs up to Rs 50-70 depending on the sizes **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Tanflora Infrastructure Park, exemplifies the region's innovative spirit. By providing centralized infrastructure, technical training, they empowers farmers to produce export-quality roses. Hosur-Bengaluru region is known as the "Valentine's Day rose capital of India." Every year, millions of roses are grown here specifically for the holiday. Beyond the romance, Valentine's Day rose production plays a vital role in the local economy. —*Salar News*

Glitter roses & black roses

Glitter roses are the new fad, where roses are quoted in shiny liquid. Besides, black roses also another favourite among buyers. However, it costs more than regular red roses at almost ₹150 per piece.

—*Salar News*

AI-based cameras for B'luru-Mysuru highway

MYSURU, 12 FEB

As motorists gear up to traverse the bustling Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway, a new system of vigilant oversight awaits them. Authorities are set to install Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras along the 119-kilometre highway, promising to penalise rule violators with precision.The ambitious initiative entails the deployment of ANPR cameras across six strategic points along the expressway, offering comprehensive coverage of traffic activities. The approximate expenditure for this project has been estimated at 3.63 crores.These cameras can detect a wide range of violations, including speeding, lane indiscipline, one-way infractions, and the unauthorised passage of vehicles. Moreover, their implementation is expected to mitigate the incidence of robberies and accidents, underscoring their multifaceted utility in promoting public safety.The operational mechanism is designed to capture real-time footage of rule infractions, swiftly transmitting the incriminating evidence to a central control room via the Internet. —*Salar News*

Next hearing on Hemant Soren's plea on 27 Feb

RANCHI, 12 FEB

The High Court of Jharkhand on Monday adjourned the hearing on a petition filed by arrested ex-chief minister Hemant Soren against the Enforcement Directorate (ED) till 27 February. It asked the federal agency to file a consolidated affidavit. Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan said they had challenged the arrest of the former chief minister, and the High Court allowed their amended application to be submitted. "ED has been directed to give a consolidated reply. The court has fixed 27 February as the date for final disposal. The amendment to our application has been allowed...Now hearing will be on the turn of events (leading to Hemant Soren's arrest). This is a good indication, now we can place all the facts before the court," Ranjan, Soren's counsel, said. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal argued on behalf of Soren. The High Court had asked the ED to file its reply.—*PTI*

Kejri used Delhi funds on hotels, claims BJP's Shazia

NEW DELHI, 2 FEB

BJP spokesperson Shazia Ilmi on Monday alleged that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal used Delhi government's funds to book presidential suites in hotels in other states. At a press conference, Ilmi alleged that Kejriwal stayed in the most expensive rooms in five-star hotels in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka."Presidential, Maharaja, Imperial suites, which cost around Rs 2-3 lakh per night, were booked for Delhi chief minister," she claimed. "In Punjab, they have the AAP government, so they can stay in the state guest house but he (Kejriwal) stayed in five-star hotels," she added.The BJP leader claimed that on an average, around Rs. 1.5 crore is spent in 50 days for the chief minister's stay arrangements in hotels, adding, "This is the money that belongs to the people of Delhi."Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will be cut short in Uttar Pradesh in view of board exams.
—*PTI*

Maratha quota: Jarange continues fast for 3rd day

JALNA, 12 FEB

Activist Manoj Jarange on Monday accused the Maharashtra government of diverting the core issue of Maratha reservation and claimed it was considering a separate quota for the community.Jarange continued his indefinite fast at his native Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna district for the third day on Monday over his demand that a special session of the Maharashtra legislature be convened to convert the draft notification on "blood relatives" of Kunbi Marathas into a law.In December last year, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde said a special session of the state legislature will be held in February, if necessary, to provide reservation to the Maratha community after reviewing a report of the Backward Class Commission. Jarange on Monday reiterated his demand for the immediate implementation of the draft notification. He accused the government of diverting the core issue of quota for the community.—*PTI*

SC to hear AP govt's plea against Naidu's bail

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday fixed for 26 February the hearing of the Andhra Pradesh government's plea against a High Court order granting regular bail to TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu in the skill development corporation scam case. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal adjourned the hearing after senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for Naidu, informed it that senior advocate Harish Salve will be arguing the matter but he is unavailable today. He sought deferment of the hearing for two weeks to enable Salve to argue the matter. —*PTI*

TN Guv ends speech over 'disrespect' to anthem

'Expunged remarks were Guv's personal comments'

CHENNAI, 12 FEB

Tamil Nadu governor RN Ravi on Monday refused to read out the complete text of the customary address to the state Assembly, claiming it has 'misleading facts', and lambasted the ruling DMK over the national anthem issue, remarks that were 'expunged' in yet another showdown between the Raj Bhavan and the state government.

The expunged remarks were Ravi's 'personal' comments and only the approved text would be in the records, Speaker M Appavu said.

The Governor also walked out of the House before the national anthem was played.

Ravi reading out from such a text would be a "Constitutional travesty," the Raj Bhavan later said, explaining the sequence of events.

The national anthem was also at the centre of controversy as Ravi demanded it be played before and after the address while the government maintained it was not in lines with the House tradition and rules.

For the second year in a row, the state Assembly witnessed controversy during the Governor's

The Governor also walked out of the House before the National Anthem was played **PHOTO: PTI**

Address. Last year, on 9 January, Ravi omitted some portions of the government-prepared address and also included few points on his own before the a resolution was adopted to restore the original draft in the records.

Ravi only read out from the first of the 46-page speech on Monday.

The Raj Bhavan charged Appavu with launching a tirade on Ravi and insisted he walked out to uphold the dignity of the office of the Governor.

The draft Governor's address was received on 9 February and it had 'numerous passages' with "misleading claims far

- The Raj Bhavan charged Appavu with launching a tirade on Ravi and insisted he walked out to uphold the dignity of the office of the Governor

from truth." Ravi, therefore, returned the file and also advised the government to show due respect to the national anthem by playing it at the beginning and end of the Governor's address.

In this regard, the Governor had written to the Chief Minister and the Speaker in the past as well. The state government, however, 'chose to ignore' his advice, it said in a release.

"The Governor's address should reflect government's achievements, policies and programmes and to inform the House of the causes of its summons and should not be a forum for peddling misleading statements and venting blatantly partisan political views."

Though the Speaker read the government prepared Governor's address with which Ravi had disagreement, he "sat through it, till the conclusion of the address." Appavu read the Tamil version of the address. When the Speaker concluded , Ravi stood up for the national anthem, as scheduled."However, the Speaker, instead of following the schedule, launched a tirade against the Governor and called him a follower of Nathuram Godse and more. The Speaker with his unbecoming conduct lowered the dignity of his chair and grace of the House. While the Speaker went on his tirade against the Governor, the Governor with due regard to the dignity of his office and the House, left the House." —*PTI*

Cong takes swipe at Chavan after he quits

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Chavan wrote to state unit President Nana Patole to say he was resigning **PHOTO: PTI**

"Betrayers" don't realise their exit opens up vast new opportunities for those whose growth they have always stunted, the Congress said on Monday as former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan quit the party amid speculation that he is veering towards the BJP.

In a setback to the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Chavan wrote to state unit president Nana Patole to say he was resigning as a primary member, adding to the list of high-profile leaders who have exited the party.

The 65-year-old also submitted his resignation as an MLA to Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar.

"When friends and colleagues leave a political party that has given them much - perhaps much more (than) they deserved - it is always a matter of anguish," Congress General Secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said without naming Chavan.

Asked about Chavan leaving the party, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said it is difficult these days to do politics while staying in the opposition.

"Some are pressured by probe agencies, some lured with inducements. Those who have left the party in the last few days - look at the Enforcement Directorate cases against them, the picture will be clear to you," she said.

Only those leaders can do politics being part of the opposition who have the courage to fight, and Rahul Gandhi is doing that by standing with truth, Shrinate said.

The development comes days after senior Maharashtra Congress leaders Baba Siddique and Milind Deora quit the party.

The Congress has witnessed a series of exits in the last few years with the likes of Jyotiraditya Scindia, Jitin Prasad, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Sushmita Dev, RPN Singh, Jaiveer Shergill, among other, joining other parties.

Amid a buzz that Chavan may join the BJP, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis told reporters, "Aagey aagey dekho hota hai kya (wait and watch)".
—*PTI*

RaGa writes to PM on WB MGNREGS workers

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the "devastating plight" of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS) workers in West Bengal and urged his government to facilitate the release of central funds to the state for clearing their pending wages.

In his letter to Modi, Gandhi said that during his recent visit to West Bengal as part of the Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra, a delegation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) workers from the Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity apprised him of the issues faced by them.

PHOTO: PTI

Flagging the "devastating plight" of MGNREGS workers in West Bengal and their relentless fight for justice, he said, "Lakhs of our brothers and sisters have been denied work and wages under MGNREGS due to the stoppage of central funds to West Bengal since March, 2022."

"I was informed that many workers have not been paid for work completed in 2021 due to shortfall in funds," the former Congress chief said in his letter to Modi dated 10 February.

Moreover, there has been a "drastic decline in the number of households availing work from 75 lakh in 2021-22 to under 8,000 households in 2023-24", Gandhi said."This massive scale down has been brutal on the most vulnerable -- women, and SC and ST households. The lack of MGNREGS work and pending wages have forced many to make hard choices -- particularly distress migration," he said.Meanwhile, Gandhi has decided to reduce the duration of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Uttar Pradesh in view of the state board examinations for Classes 10 and 12, party members said on Monday. —*PTI*

WILL LIST PLEA OF THACKERAY FACTION: SC

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

The Supreme Court said on Monday it will list the plea of the Uddhav Thackeray faction challenging Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar's order declaring the Shiv Sena bloc led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as the "real political party" after the outfit's split in June 2022.The plea of the Thackeray faction was listed for hearing on Monday but the matter could not be taken up during the day due to paucity of time."Let them (Shinde faction) file a response. The notice was issued earlier," senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the Thackeray faction, told the bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra."We will list it," CJI DY Chandrachd said.—*PTI*

AAP IN AYODHYA

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during a visit to the Ram Temple, in Ayodhya, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP gave 1.5 times more jobs than preceding govt, says PM

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said his government has given 1.5 times more jobs in its 10 years than the previous dispensation did in the same duration.

Handing over recruitment letters for government jobs to more than one lakh youngsters during a Rozgar Mela programme, Modi castigated the previous government for taking an inordinately "long time" to complete recruitment exercises and said it bred bribery.

Modi said his government has brought transparency and is working to ensure that recruitment is done in a time-bound manner.

Youngsters now believe that they all have equal opportunity and can find a place for themselves in the government system through hard work and talent, he said.

He asserted that the measures taken by his government, be it a scheme for rooftop solar power for one crore homes or the massive investment in infrastructure, have been creating a lot of employment opportunities.

With over 1.25 lakh startups, India is the third largest eco-system in the sector, and youngsters are launching new firms in even smaller cities, he said, adding that it is creating lakhs of jobs.Modi said 40,000 modern coaches like those used in the Vande Bharat trains will be manufactured and included in normal trains to increase convenience and comfort for passengers.Accusing previous governments of not paying due attention to the railways, he said the entire sector is transforming now."They neglected the common people's expectations," Modi said. —*PTI*

'Don't know why Nitish left Mahagathbandhan'

PATNA, 12 FEB

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Monday said he always considered Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar as a "father figure", and wondered what forced him to ditch the 'Mahagathbandhan' and return to the BJP-led NDA.

Taking part in the debate on the confidence motion moved by the Kumar-led NDA government in the assembly, Yadav also taunted his ex-boss for having been sworn in "for a record ninth time, and also for the third time within a five-year term, something which has no precedent".

"I always considered Nitish Kumar as 'Dashrath'. I don't know what reasons forced him to ditch the 'Mahagathbandhan'," the former deputy CM said.

Yadav, who had been restrained ever since the upheaval a fortnight ago when Kumar made a return to the NDA fold, vented spleen on the floor of the state assembly."The BJP was scared of the 'Mahagathbandhan' government in Bihar... Can Prime Minister Narendra Modi guarantee that Nitish Kumar will not do another volte-face?" he said."I feel bad for JD(U) MLAs because they will have to go to the people and answer."said the RJD leader.Yadav called himself "nephew" of Kumar and asserted that he would stop the BJP in Bihar. —*PTI*

ED issues fresh summons to Farooq

National Conference (NC) President Farooq Abdullah has been asked to depose at the ED office in Srinagar on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

SRINAGAR / NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

The Enforcement Directorate has issued a fresh summons to National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah for questioning in a money laundering case pertaining to the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA), official sources said Monday.

He has been asked to depose at the ED office in Srinagar Tuesday.

The 86-year-old politician was last called by the central agency in this case on 11 January but he did not appear before it.

He is not expected to appear at the Srinagar office of the central agency this time too, sources close to him said.The ED investigation pertains to alleged financial irregularities at the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association.

The MP from Srinagar was charge-sheeted by the Enforcement Directorate in this case in 2022.The case relates to siphoning off JKCA funds by way of transfer to various personal bank accounts of unrelated parties, including those of JKCA office-bearers, and by way of unexplained cash withdrawals from its bank accounts, the ED had said. —*PTI*

ABUSE OF WOMEN

Guv in Sandeshkhali; 6 BJP MLAs suspended

KOLKATA, 12 FEB

Tensions simmered in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali block, as Governor CV Ananda Bose made a hurried visit to the troubled region, pledging justice for the women who claimed to have suffered abuses, even as six BJP lawmakers faced suspension for raising concerns about the situation in the Assembly.

Protests persisted in Sandeshkhali for the fifth consecutive day, with a significant number of women taking to the streets, demanding the arrest of TMC leader Sheikh Shajahan and his alleged "gang." The accusations include forcefully capturing land and sexually harassing women.

Shajahan, wanted since a mob attacked Enforcement Directorate (ED) officers during a raid at his residence in an alleged ration scam, has been absconding since last month.

"What I saw was ghastly, shocking, shattering to my senses. I cannot believe this could happen in Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore's land," Bose told reporters.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, downplayed the significance of the governor's visit, and said, "We have already arrested those against whom there have been allegations," before leaving for a programme in Hooghly district.

The political firestorm reached the Assembly, where BJP MLAs demanded a response from Banerjee, leading to a chaotic scene.

Inside the Assembly, BJP lawmakers, adorned in 'We are with Sandeshkhali' T-shirts, sat on the floor of the House, shouting slogans which led to a ruckus.

Despite appeals by Speaker Biman Banerjee, BJP MLAs remained defiant and continued with their protests.

Following this, the Speaker allowed state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sovandeb Chatterjee to move a motion for the suspension of the BJP legislators.

Six BJP MLAs, including Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, were

Senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari and other BJP MLAs were stopped from visiting Sandeshkhali **PHOTO: PTI**

WB: BJP leaders stopped from visiting Sandeshkhali

Kolkata, 12 Feb

Senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari and several other MLAs of the party were stopped from visiting the unrest-hit Sandeshkhali area on Monday afternoon, with the police citing prohibitory orders under Section 144 of CrPC clamped in the area.Earlier in the day, six BJP legislators including Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari were suspended from the West Bengal Assembly for staging.Post-suspension, Adhikari along with other BJP MLAs boarded a bus to go and meet locals of Sandeshkhali, who have alleged sexual harassment by absconding TMC leader Shajahan.—*PTI*

Those behind violence have been arrested: Mamata

Kolkata, 12 Feb .

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said that those involved in the Sandeshkhali violence have been put behind the bars. Banerjee's remark came on a day when Governor CV Ananda Bose cut short his Kerala trip and visited the area in North 24 Parganas to assess and review the law and order situation there. Governor Bose described the Sandeshkhali situation as "ghastly" that left him "shocked and shattered". He assured the women, who tied rakhis on his wrist, of full support to get justice.The governor said he would "fight it out under the Constitution."

—*PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

1 dead in Kerala firecracker storage unit blast

ERNAKULAM, 12 FEB

One person succumbed to burn injuries while three other people are battling for their lives with severe injuries sustained in a massive blast at a firecracker warehouse on Monday in Thripunithura, in Kerala's Ernakulam district, an official said. Councillor, Ward Number 29, Sudha Suresh, said that one person died of his injuries, while the three critically injured persons have been shifted to Kalamassery Medical College. At least 18 people sustained injuries in the blast that took place around 11am at the warehouse located near the temple in Choorakkad in Puthiyakavu area. According to reports, the firecrackers for the Puthiyakavu Temple festival exploded when they were being unloaded from a vehicle to be stored at the warehouse. District Collector NSK Umesh said that the injured have been admitted to Trippunithura Taluk Hospital.*—PTI*

Five dead after bus-car collide on Yamuna Expressway

NOIDA/MATHURA, 12 FEB

Five people were charred to death on Monday as their car caught fire after a collision with a bus on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura, police said. The incident took place near the 117th milestone on the Agra-Noida carriageway of the expressway under the Mahavan police station limits in the morning, a senior officer said. "There was a collision between the bus and the Swift car. So far it has come to light that a tyre of the bus burst, it went out of control and turned on the road. The Swift car coming from behind hit the bus and both vehicles caught fire," SSP Mathura Shailesh Pandey said. *—PTI*

Telangana passes bill to ban hookah parlours

HYDERABAD, 12 FEB

The Telangana Legislative Assembly on Monday unanimously passed a Bill banning hookah parlours. State Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu, who moved the bill on behalf of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, said the organisers of hookah parlours are taking advantage of the craze for hookah smoking among youth, including college students, and that there is a possibility of youth getting addicted to it.Smoking hookah is more harmful than smoking cigarettes and it makes the smokers take toxic substances, he said. *—PTI*

Korobok script row: Train, vehicles impacted in Tripura

AGARTALA, 12 FEB

Train services and vehicular movement were severely impacted in tribal belts of Tripura, as the "indefinite" rail-road blockade over the Kokborok script issue by students' bodies began on Monday.The Tripura Central University has also suspended all undergraduate and postgraduate examinations scheduled for Monday and onwards, officials said."Movement on rail tracks, national highways and state highways in tribal regions remained suspended since morning, due to the blockades put up at several locations," a senior police officer said."Blockades were erected at many places in West Tripura district. However, normal life was largely unaffected in Agartala Municipal Corporation areas (AMC)," District Magistrate (West Tripura), Visha Kumar, told PTI.The Tipra Indigenous Students' Federation (TISF) had demanded students be allowed to write Kokborok language.*—PTI*

Huge security at borders to stop farmers' 'Delhi Chalo'

Cops are also using drones to keep a tight vigil at border points

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Massive deployment of police and paramilitary personnel besides multi-layered barricading have taken place to seal the national capital borders at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur to prevent the protesting farmers from entering the city during their scheduled 'Delhi Chalo' march on Tuesday.

The police are also using drones to keep a tight vigil at border points, an official said, adding that they are fully prepared to deal with any law and order situation.

In view of the farmers' protest and march to Parliament, the Delhi Police started preparations to check the advancing farmers march beforehand, an officer said.

Bharti Kisan Union-Doaba extends support to 'Delhi Chalo' call

The Bharti Kisan Union (Doaba) on Monday announced to support the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march on 13 February. *—PTI*

Delhi Police started preparations to check the advancing farmers march *PHOTO: PTI*

UNION MINISTERS TO HOLD TALKS WITH FARMERS

CHANDIGARH, 12 FEB

A team of three Union ministers will hold talks on Monday with a delegation of farmer leaders, who are planning to march towards Delhi. Meanwhile, convoys of tractor-trolleys have already set out from different parts of Punjab to join the march.Haryana authorities have fortified the state's border with Punjab at many places in Ambala, Jind, Fatehabad and Kurukshetra using concrete blocks, iron nails and barbed wire to scuttle the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march. *—PTI*

DELHI ON EDGE

Ahead of farmers' protest, Delhi police has issued a slew of measures. Here is a list of what is NOT ALLOWED in Delhi from today

- Large gatherings at all borders between Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.
- Tractors, trolleys, buses, trucks from UP can't enter Delhi
- Protesters not allowed to bear firearms, swords, trishuls, spears and rods
- Prohibition on use of loud-speaker, any amplifier
- Haryana suspends mobile internet services and bulk SMS
- It also suspends all dongle services except voice calls
- Permit must for wedding and funeral processions

A worker lays down barbed wire on National Highway 44 in view of farmers' 'Delhi Chalo March', near Singhu border in Sonipat district, Monday

'NO ILLEGALITY'

Constitutional to appoint DyCMs, says SC

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) challenging the practice of appointing Deputy Chief Ministers in States, saying the post does not breach the constitutional provisions.

A bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra found that the appointment of a deputy Chief Minister has no bearing in the constitutional sense as the label does not provide any extra perks.

It said the minister was a minister first and that the post of deputy chief minister was "only a label."

The post of deputy chief minister may not be defined under the Constitution, but there is no illegality in appointing senior leaders of the ruling party or a coalition of parties as deputy chief ministers, said the bench.

"The appointment of deputy chief ministers is a practice followed in some states to give a little more importance to senior leaders in the party or coalition of parties in power...it's not unconstitutional," it opined.

The top court rejected the PIL filed by the Delhi-based Public Political Party, which argued that states are setting the wrong example by appointing deputy chief ministers, which was done without any foundation in the Constitution.

The lawyer said that there is no such officer stipulated in the Constitution, and such appointments also breach the rule of equality in the council of ministers. *—ANI*

- A bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra found that the appointment of a deputy Chief Minister has no bearing in the constitutional sense as the label does not provide any extra perks

SARASWATI PUJA PREP

Workers transport an idol of Goddess Saraswati ahead of Saraswati Puja festival, in Kolkata, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

HC ADJOURNS HEARING ON CHALLENGING PUJA IN GYANVAPI MOSQUE

PRAYAGRAJ, 12 FEB

The Allahabad High Court on Monday adjourned till 15 February the hearing on a plea challenging the Varanasi district court order allowing Hindu prayers in a cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi. Justice Rohit Ranjan Agrawal passed the order on the appeal filed by the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid committee.The bench heard Punit Gupta and SFA Naqvi, counsels for the Muslim side, at length and fixed 15 February as the next date of hearing in the matter on Naqvi's request.

The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid committee, which looks after the affairs of the mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, moved the high court on 2 February within hours of the Supreme Court refusing to hear its plea *—PTI*

Situation normal in Haldwani, additional forces deployed

HALDWANI, 12 FEB

The situation in the Banbhoolpura area here, the epicentre of the mob violence last week, was normal on Monday as additional troops of paramilitary forces were deployed to maintain law and order, officials said.

Nainital Senior Superintendent of Police Prahlad Meena said essential commodities are being supplied to the residents of the curfew-hit area and more facilities will also be provided to them soon.

Meena said additional companies of central paramilitary forces have been deployed at sensitive places in Banbhoolpura.

On Sunday, the curfew was lifted in the rest of Haldwani except the Banbhoolpura area, after which the administration has streamlined the essential services, officials said.

On Sunday, the curfew was lifted in the rest of Haldwani except the Banbhoolpura area *PHOTO: PTI*

The Banbhoolpura Primary Health Centre and the medical stores in the area have been opened on and gas cylinders are also being supplied to the residents, they added.

General manager of Kumaon Mandal Development Corporation AP Vajpayee said gas cylinders are also being distributed in other curfew-affected areas like Kidwai Nagar, Indira Nagar, and Nai Basti among others.

Along with this, vegetables, milk and other essential items are being delivered by the administration through vendors.

Meanwhile, additional companies of central paramilitary forces have also been deployed at sensitive locations. Earlier, over 1,000 soldiers were already deployed in the area. *—PTI*

UPI in lanka, mauritius, 'special day' says Modi

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services were on Monday rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing it as linking historic ties with modern digital technology.

India's RuPay card services were also launched in Mauritius at a virtual ceremony attended by Prime Minister Modi, his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

In his remarks, Modi hoped the new fintech services would help the two nations and said the UPI is implementing "new responsibilities of uniting partners with India". "Today is a special day for the three countries of Indian Ocean Region as we are linking historic ties with modern digital technology."

"I believe that Sri Lanka and Mauritius will benefit from the UPI system," Modi said. The prime minister said digital public infrastructure has brought about a revolutionary change in India. He also highlighted India's focus on its "neighbourhood first policy". *—PTI*

FARMERS' DEATHS

Lakhimpur Kheri violence: SC extends interim bail to Ashish Mishra

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday extended the interim bail granted to Union minister Ajay Kumar Mishra's son Ashish Mishra in the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence which claimed eight lives.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan directed the apex court registry to obtain a report from the trial court on the progress of the case and adjourned the matter.

On 26 September last year, the top court had relaxed the bail conditions of Mishra to enable him to visit and stay in the National Capital Region to look after his ailing mother and for the treatment of his daughter.

The case pertains to an incident of violence on 3 October, 2021, in which eight people, including four farmers, were killed in Tikunia in Lakhimpur Kheri district in Uttar Pradesh.

The apex court had relaxed the interim bail conditions imposed on Mishra by the trial court on 25 January.

Mishra was asked not to stay either in Uttar Pradesh or in Delhi during the period.

The court had passed the order on a modification application filed by Mishra which stated that his mother was admitted to the RamManohar Lohia (RML) Hospital in Delhi.

Mishra had further said in the application that his daughter needed treatment for certain deformities in her legs.

The top court bench had allowed the application on humanitarian ground, but said Mishra should not participate in any public function. *—PTI*

EAM meets ASEAN Secy General Hourn

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday met ASEAN Secretary General, Kao Kim Hourn in Delhi.

The two leaders, as they met, discussed connectivity, food security and trade.

In a post on social media platform X, the EAM wrote, "Pleased to meet Secretary General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn of ASEAN today morning.""Discussed taking forward our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Our agenda focused on connectivity, food security and trade," he added.ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn arrived in Delhi on Sunday evening, kicking off his five-day visit to India.

This is Kao Kim Hourn's first official visit to India since assuming office in January 2023, spanning from February 11 to 15. Students from ASEAN Member States pursue higher education at the University under ASEAN-India cooperation projects. *—PTI*

'1.59 lakh declared as foreigners in Assam'

GUWAHATI, 12 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

More than 1.59 lakh people have been declared as 'foreigners' in Assam so far, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

He said that another 96,000 have been marked as 'Doubtful' (D) voters.

Sarma, who also holds the Home portfolio, said 100 Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs), which deal with the citizenship issue of D-voters in the state, are currently functional in the state.

He was responding to a question by opposition AIUDF legislator Aminul Islam in the assembly.

The Chief Minister said that 1,59,353 people have been declared as foreigners by these tribunals till December 31, 2023.

The FTs have disposed of 3,37,186 cases till the end of last year and 96,149 cases are pending before various FTs, he added.

In reply to another question from Congress MLA Sherman Ali Ahmed, Sarma said as per data, there are 96,987 D-voters in the state as of date.

He said a total of 41,275 D-voters are yet to receive FT notice as it is served after following due procedure and it takes time to observe all formalities. *—PTI*

SOUMYA VISHWANATHAN CASE

Delhi HC grants bail to four life convicts

NEW DELHI,12 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Monday granted bail to four convicts serving life imprisonment in the murder case of TV journalist Soumya Vishwanathan.

A bench of Justices Suresh Kumar Kait and Girish Kathpalia suspended the sentence of Ravi Kapoor, Amit Shukla, Baljeet Singh Malik and Ajay Kumar till the pendency of their appeals challenging their conviction and sentence.

The bench noted that the convicts have been in custody for 14 years.

The High Court had on 23 January asked the Delhi Police to respond to the appeals filed by the four convicts.

A special court had on 26 November, 2023, awarded two life terms to Ravi Kapoor, Amit Shukla, Baljeet Malik and Ajay Kumar under Section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 3(1)(i) (committing organised crime resulting in the death of any person) of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

The court had made it clear that the sentences will run "consecutively".

The fifth convict, Ajay Sethi, was handed down three years of simple imprisonment under section 411 (dishonestly receiving stolen property) of the IPC.

It, however, set off the three-year sentence against the time Sethi had already served, noting he remained in custody for more than 14 years and underwent incarceration during the trial for offences under the IPC and MCOCA for conspiring to abet, aid, or knowingly facilitate organised crime and receiving proceeds of organised crime.

Kapoor's counsel had submitted that he has been in custody for the last 14 years and nine months and urged the court to suspend his sentence during the pendency of the appeal.

A similar prayer for suspension of sentence was also made by advocate Amit Kumar, who represented Shukla, Malik and Ajay Kumar.

While sentencing Kapoor, Shukla, Malik and Kumar to double life imprisonment, the trial court had also imposed a fine of Rs 1.25 lakh on each of them. It had imposed a fine of Rs 7.25 lakh on Sethi.

Recently, the high court denied parole to Kapoor, considering the gravity of the offences committed by him. *—PTI*

Soumya Vishwanathan, who worked with a leading English news channel, was shot dead on 30 September, 2008 *PHOTO: X*

- The High Court had on 23 January asked the Delhi Police to respond to the appeals filed by the four convicts. A special court had on 26 November, 2023, awarded 2 life terms

OCEAN SCARE

Workers from state own Heritage Petroleum Oil and Gas Company clean up an oil spill that reached Rockly Bay beach, in Scarborough, south western Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago, on Sunday
PHOTO: PTI

Is reverse migration from Canada on the cards?

Balkar returned to India in early 2023 because of the crisis of high cost of living in Canada ***PHOTO: BBC***

Canada has long been a draw for people from India's Punjab province seeking new opportunities elsewhere. But has the Canadian dream soured?

It's hard to miss the ardour of Punjab's migrant ambitions when driving through its fertile rural plains.

Off the highways, consultancies offer English language coaching to eager youth.

Single-storey brick homes double up as canvasses for hand-painted mural advertisements promising quick visas. And in the town of Bathinda, hundreds of agents jostle for space on a single narrow street, pledging to speed up the youth's runaway dreams.

For over a century, this province in India's northwest has seen waves of overseas migration; from the Sikh soldiers inducted into the British Indian Army travelling to Canada, through to rural Punjabis settling in England post-independence.

But some, especially from Canada, are now choosing to come back home.

One of those is 28-year-old Balkar, who returned in early 2023 after just one year in Toronto. Citizenship was his ultimate goal when he left his little hamlet of Pitho in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. His family mortgaged their land to fund his education.

But his Canadian dream quickly lost its allure a few months into his life there.

"Everything was so expensive. I had to work 50 hours every week after college, just to survive," he told the BBC. "High inflation is making many students leave their studies."

Balkar now runs an embroidery business from a small room on one side of the expansive central courtyard in his typical Punjabi home. He also helps on his family's farm to supplement his income.

Opportunities for employment are few and far between in these rural areas, but technology has allowed entrepreneurs like him to conquer the tyranny of distance. Balkar gets the bulk of his business through Instagram.

"I have a good life here. Why should I face hardships there when I can live at home and make good money?" he asks.

Karan Aulakh, who spent nearly 15 years in Edmonton said he was upset by LGBT-inclusive education policies in Canada and its 2018 decision to legalise recreational cannabis.Incompatibility with the Western way of life, a struggling healthcare system, and better economic prospects in India were, he said, key reasons why many older Canadian Indians are preparing to leave the countryAccording to Canada's statistics agency, immigration accounted for 90 per cent of Canada's labour force growth and 75 per cent of population growth in 2021.

International students contribute to over C$20bn to Canada's economy each year, a bulk of them Indians who now make up one in five recent immigrants to the country.India was also Canada's leading source for immigration in 2022.There was a 40 per cent decline in applications from India for Canadian study permits in the second half of 2023, according to one estimate. This was, in part, also due to the ongoing diplomatic tensions between India and Canada over allegations Indian agents were involved in the murder of Canadian Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar.There are also hints of deeper cultural factors at play, for a waning Canadian dream among an older generation of Indian migrants.Fewer permanent residents are also going on to become Canadian citizens, according to census data cited by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship. In 2001, 75 per cent of those eligible became citizens. Two decades later, it was 45 per cent.

It comes as Canada debates its aggressive immigration targets given country's struggle to absorb more people. A recent report from National Bank of Canada economists cautioned that the population growth was putting pressure on its already tight housing supply and strained healthcare system.Canada has seen a population surge - an increase of 1.2 million people in 2023 - driven mostly by newcomers. The report argued that growth needed to be slowed to an annual increase of up to 500,000 people in order to preserve or increase the standard of living.

There appears to have been a tacit acceptance of this evaluation by policymakers.

Trudeau's Liberal government recently introduced a cap on international student permits that would result in a temporary decrease of 35 per cent in approved study visas.

It's a significant policy shift that some believe may end up further reducing Canada's

SALAR سالار

Nearly half of migratory species declining: Report

As well as the intrinsic benefits, migratory species play a key role in maintaining global ecosystems ***PHOTO: PTI***

A first-of-its-kind report on migratory species has revealed a dire situation, with many animals facing extinction. The report, coinciding with a biodiversity conference in Uzbekistan, has called for urgent action.

A new UN report on migratory species has revealed that these key animals are facing dangerous population decline while some are on the verge of extinction.

The State of the World's Migratory Species report — the first of its kind — was published on Monday to coincide with the UN biodiversity conference in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on the Convention of Migratory Species and Wild Animals (CMS).

What was the key finding?

According to the report, of the species listed under the convention, almost half (44 per cent) have already seen apparent population declines while nearly all of the fish species (97 per cent) are threatened with extinction. "Today's report clearly shows us that unsustainable human activities are jeopardizing the future of migratory species — creatures who not only act as indicators of environmental change but play an integral role in maintaining the function and resilience of our planet's complex ecosystems," Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Program said.

What are the major threats to migratory species?

As well as the intrinsic benefits that come from biodiversity, migratory species play a key role in maintaining global ecosystems. They are often involved in pollinating plants, transporting ing to store carbon.The report states that the biggest threats to migratory species come from human activity: habitat loss and overexploitation.Three-quarters of the CMS-listed species were affected by loss, degradation, or fragmentation of their habitats. The report said that 58 per ecent of monitored sites considered key for CMS-listed species were experiencing unsustainable levels of human-caused pressure. Overexploitation, meaning intentionally hunting or fishing as well as accidental capture, was reported as impacting 70 per cent of the species listed in the CMS.

Of course, climate change, pollution and invasive species have also taken their toll on migratory species.

A call to action

The report called on the international community to take steps to strengthen conservation and reverse the dire situation many migratory species are facing."When species cross national borders, their survival depends on the efforts of all countries in which they are found. This landmark report will help underpin much-needed policy actions to ensure that migratory species continue to thrive around the world," CMS Executive Secretary Amy Fraenkel said.The policy recommendations include increasing efforts to tackle illegal and unsustainable capture of migratory species; increasing protections and managing of sites important to such species; and urgently addressing the threats against those species most in danger of extinction — including almost all fish species covered by the convention.The report also added to the mounting calls for action against climate change and pollution. It also highlighted the need to include more species on the CMS listing. The CMS conference in Samarkand will give world leaders the opportunity to agree to practices that could help protect these vital species.

"The global community has an opportunity to translate this latest science of the pressures facing migratory species into concrete conservation action," Executive Director Andersen said."-Given the precarious situation of many of these animals, we cannot afford to delay, and must work together to make the recommendations a reality."

Courtesy, DW News

According to the report, of the species listed under the convention, almost half (44%) have already seen apparent population declines while nearly all of the fish species (97%) are threatened with extinction ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS Write to us at salar@salar.news

How AI is used to resurrect dead politicians ahead of 2024 elections

The reaction to these AI videos has prompted the DMK party leadership to think of creating AI Karunanidhi campaign speeches in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

On 23 January, an icon of Indian cinema and politics, M Karunanidhi appeared before a live audience on a large projected screen, to congratulate his 82-year-old friend and fellow politician TR Baalu on the launch of his autobiographical book.

Dressed in his trademark black sunglasses, white shirt, and a yellow shawl around his shoulders — Karunanidhi's style was spot on. In his eight-minute speech, the veteran poet-turned-politician congratulated the book's author but was also effusive in his praise for the able leadership of MK Stalin, his son and the current leader of the state.

Karunanidhi has been dead since 2018. This was the third time, in the past six months, that the iconic leader of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) party was resurrected using artificial intelligence (AI) for such public events.

"When the COVID pandemic ravaged the world, our Chief Minister ran in the direction of panicked voices of people," Karunanidhi said. "The nation knows the way you fought to save the lives of people, and so do I."

Senthil Nayagam, founder of Muonium, the AI media tech firm that made the deepfake Karunanidhi video, told Al Jazeera that "there is a market opening up [for such deepfakes]…. You can attribute some statements to a particular person and that kind of gives more value to it".

AI Karunanidhi's first public appearance was at a local media event last year in September, which was followed up by another for a campaign by his party members. The resurrected leader often felicitates party workers and specifically praises the leadership of his son MK Stalin — with the aim of boosting his popularity.

As per local media reports, the reaction to these AI videos has prompted the DMK party leadership to think of creating AI Karunanidhi campaign speeches in the upcoming 2024 parliamentary election campaign.

An ethical and legal quandary

Even as policymakers evaluate instances of the types of AI communication that should be regulated, in a first-of-its-kind use, a political party used AI to resurrect a yesteryear political stalwart to promote today's leader.

But it has also raised some troubling ethical and legal questions: "The use of AI to create synthetic audio and video by a living person who has signed off on the content is one thing. It is quite another to resurrect a dead person and ascribe opinions to them," said Amber Sinha, senior fellow for Trustworthy AI at Mozilla Foundation.

"In Tamil Nadu, all the big leaders of each party are no more," Nayagam said, referring to former actors-turned-politicians Jayalalitha, MG Ramachandran, and Vijayakanth. Nayagam said he has been in touch with several low-level functionaries across party lines interested in leveraging AI for similar deepfakes.

Globally, over 60 countries are set to hold national elections in 2024, and the possible misuse of artificial intelligence to influence public opinion has caused a moral panic, turning into a global hot-button issue.

"This particular use of AI in campaigns seems to be taking off in South Asia in a big way," said Sinha of Mozilla Foundation.

On 21 January, the DMK party organised its second annual youth wing conference in the temple town of Salem. The mega event hosted in an open arena drew a crowd of 500,000 supporters and marked the official launch of the 2024 election campaign of the DMK. Party leaders offered rousing speeches challenging the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and criticised its policies including the dilution of the powers of the states by the BJP-ruled centre.

At this campaign, AI Karunanidhi made a surprise video reappearance. "Many hard-fought states' rights have been lost in the 10-year BJP rule," Karunanidhi said, elaborating on the continued hostility of the BJP towards Tamil Nadu.The three-minute video speech, accompanied by inspiring music, concludes with AI Karunanidhi calling for the strengthening of the state's rights, and urging young cadres to fight for a democratic future.

"This was created by the party's digital media wing to encourage and enthuse the cadres," DMK spokesperson Dharanidharan Selvam told Al Jazeera. "I think the cadres were definitely enthusiastic and excited."

Deceased leaders are in vogue for political campaigns "because they continue to be more popular than the living ones", said Sumanth Raman, a Chennai-based political commentator. "You don't have mass leaders of the calibre of Ms Jayalalitha" — another political starlet — "or Karunanidhi in Tamil Nadu at the moment".An additional conundrum in resurrecting a deceased politician is: Who owns the rights to the dead person's voice and likeness?

"This, of course, doesn't have legal grounding in India, because we don't have any enshrined rights of deceased people in India, but from an ethical point of view, consent needs to be considered," said Devika Malik, a Delhi-based tech policy consultant focused on online trust and safety. Indian law offers legal protection against defamation of a dead person.

From a social impact standpoint, to what extent these AI videos — even poorly made ones — could shape voter attitudes remains unclear. Leveraging sentimental appeals from specific stalwarts or families — especially when it is personalised and sent on WhatsApp — can be an effective communication strategy and could sway voter opinion, Malik added.

Courtesy, Al-Jazeera

US Defence Secy Austin hospitalised again

WASHINGTON, 12 FEB

Pentagon Press Secretary Major Gen Pat Ryder announced on Monday that duties in the Secretary of Defence's office have been transferred to Deputy Secretary of Defence Kathleen Hicks after US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J Austin III was hospitalised for symptoms of bladder issue. Secretary Austin was transported to Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre on Sunday afternoon at approximately 2:20 pm (local time). Ryder said, "Austin III was transported by his security detail to Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre to be seen for symptoms suggesting an emergent bladder issue. *—ANI*

Pak: Fire erupts at Karachi hospital, seven injured

KARACHI, 12 FEB

Seven paramedical staff members sustained severe burns on Sunday after a fire broke out at the emergency room of Sindh Government Hospital Liaquatabad in Karachi, Dawn reported, citing the local authorities. According to Zeeshan Shafiq Siddiqi, the Central Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), cops raced to the scene after learning of a possible "explosion" within the hospital. "Seven persons were injured and were moved to the Burns Centre of Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital Karachi for treatment," the SSP said. The Bomb Disposal Unit (BDU) was also brought in to ascertain the precise nature of the explosion. According to Siddiqi, the initial inquiry revealed that a short circuit in the hospital's emergency ward caused a fire. *—ANI*

Dubai PM meets with IMF Managing Director

DUBAI, 12 FEB

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, today met with Kristalina Georgieva, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), ahead of the World Governments Summit 2024 (WGS), which kicks of tomorrow (Monday), in Dubai under the theme "Shaping Future Governments". The meeting was held in the presence of Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of Dubai Executive Council, and Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, First Deputy Ruler, and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance *—ANI*

Alexander Stubb wins Finland's Presidential polls

HELSINKI, 12 FEB

Alexander Stubb won the election runoff against ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto to become Finland's next President and steer the country's foreign and security policy, reported Al Jazeera. After all votes were counted on Sunday, independent Haavisto of the green left received 48.4 per cent of the vote, while Stubb of the centre-right National Coalition Party received 51.6 per cent. The initial percentage of voters cast was 70.7 per cent. Stubb, the Nordic country's former Prime Minister who began his career in politics in 2004 as a member of the European Parliament, defeated Haavisto with 27.2 per cent of the vote on January 28 in the first round of voting, reported Al Jazeera. After YLE, the state broadcaster in Finland, presented a projection on Sunday night that indicated Stubb had won; Haavisto, 65, announced his defeat. *—ANI*

PML-N moots idea of 'participatory govt'

Nawaz Sharif has 75 seats in the 266-member National Assembly, the single largest party

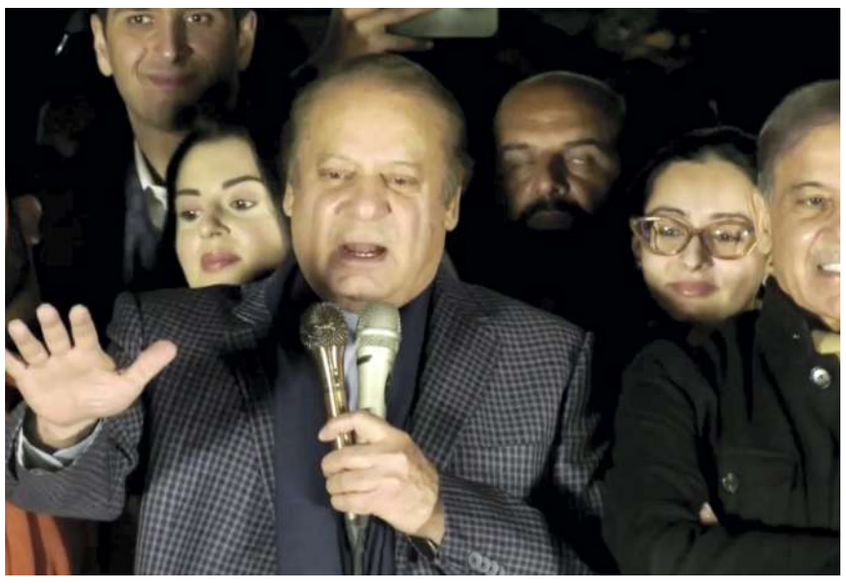
ISLAMABAD, 12 FEB

The Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) led by former three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif has pitched the idea of a "participatory coalition government" to rival parties to end the logjam following the split verdict in the 8 February election, according to media reports on Monday.

PML-N has 75 seats in the 266-member National Assembly, the single largest party. Independent members, mostly backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, have secured 101 seats.

The International Monetary Fund review mission is scheduled to visit Pakistan following the formation of new governments at the central and provincial levels.

Former law minister Azam Nazeer Tarar termed this scenario 'Hobson's choice' and said not a single political party had secured a majority in the National Assembly, insisting that elections were "fair". The senior PML-N leader was talking to the media after a meeting of the party's top brass at Jati Umra in Lahore during which consultations were held regarding the future course of action. The ex-minister said the PML-N had started consultations with its former allies to form a unity government in the Centre.



The International Monetary Fund review mission is scheduled to visit Pakistan following the formation of new governments *PHOTO: PTI*

"There's only the possibility of forming the (federal) government with the backing of the PML-N. It will be a participatory coalition government," he said, adding that it was in "the largest interest of the country that all should join hands" to form the federal government, the Dawn newspaper reported.

- Azam Nazeer Tarar termed this scenario 'Hobson's choice' and said not a single political party had secured a majority in the National Assembly

According to PML-N sources, the initial formula stipulates that if the coalition parties agree to give the post of prime minister to the PML-N, then the post of president and speaker will be given to the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), The Express Tribune newspaper reported. Similarly, the post of deputy speaker can be given to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan or any of the independent members joining the coalition. Besides, the PML-N may keep the finance ministry, and other ministries will be distributed among allies with mutual consultation. *—PTI*

Khan's party to sit in Oppn: Leader

ISLAMABAD, 12 FEB

Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party will not join hands with rival PML-N or the PPP to form a coalition government and would sit in the opposition despite having a majority in the newly elected Parliament, party leader Barrister Gohar Ali Khan has said. Independent candidates, mostly affiliated with Khan's PTI, secured the most parliamentary seats in last week's general election. However, PTI does not have enough seats in the 266-member National Assembly to form a government on its own. "We don't feel comfortable with both the parties. *—PTI*

Poll backlash: KSE-100 index loses 1,800 pts

ISLAMABAD, 12 FEB

The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) on Monday was dominated by bears that dragged its benchmark KSE-100 index down by 1,800 points, with analysts attributing the losses to "political uncertainty".

The KSE-100 index lost 1582.45, or 2.51 per cent, to stand at 61,361.29 at 1:17pm from the previous close of 62,943.74 points. At 1:34pm, the index plunged by 1819.06 points, or 2.89pc, from the previous close

It should be mentioned that the index had plunged 1,200 points on Friday, over the delay in announcing the results of general elections, to settle below 63,000. Yousuf M. Farooq, director of research at Chase Securities, said that the market opened under pressure today due to "unresolved political uncertainty over the weekend".

Farooq noted that volatility would remain until there was clarity on the political front. Exploration and production companies — such as Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDC) and Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) — experienced the largest decline due to delays in the approval of the circular debt clearance programme from the IMF, he said. *—Dawn*

The KSE-100 index lost 1582.45 *PHOTO: PTI*

Houthi say they targeted cargo ship

DUBAI, 12 FEB

The Houthi rebels said on Monday they attacked a US vessel in the Red Sea, after the maritime security firms reported that missiles were fired on a bulk carrier.

"The naval forces of the Yemeni Armed Forces targeted the American ship Star Iris in the Red Sea with a number of suitable naval missiles, and the strikes were accurate and direct," Houthi spokesman Yahya Saree said.

The Houthis have been targeting Red Sea shipping vessels for months, triggering US and British reprisal attacks.

The Houthis say the attacks are intended to show solidarity with Palestinians in Gazal *PHOTO: MOD*

The Houthis say the attacks are intended to show solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, which has been under attack by Israel following the since 7 October Hamas attack.

The group owner and operator of the bulk carrier targeted on Monday regularly trades cargo with Iran, "so this was assessed to be the likely destination", a security firm Ambrey said.

"The group owner of the bulker was also listed on the US stock market index NASDAQ, which was identified as the likely reason for the attack," it said.

The Houthis' attacks have prompted some shipping companies to detour around southern Africa to avoid the Red Sea, a vital route that normally carries about 12 percent of global maritime trade. *—Arab News*

Ukraine 'confirms' Russian forces using Starlink

KYIV, 12 FEB

Ukrainian intelligence said it has confirmed that Russian forces are using satellite internet service Starlink on the battlefield in occupied areas in the east of the country.

Releasing what it said on Sunday was proof, Ukraine's military intelligence said it has confirmed earlier reports that of the "systemic" use by Russian troops of terminals of Elon Musk's satellite communications system.

Starlink systems have been vital for Ukraine's battlefield communications in Russia's nearly two-year-old invasion as Kyiv has faced a larger and better-equipped military. The personal control of Starlink by the US billionaire, who has regularly repeated Kremlin talking points regarding the conflict, remains a concern for Kyiv and its allies. The terminals were rushed in to help Ukraine after Russia's February 2022 invasion and have been vital to Kyiv's battlefield communications. Following reports in Ukraine, Space X said last week that it "does not do business of any kind with the Russian government or its military".

Starlink systems have been vital for Ukraine's battlefield *PHOTO: PTI*

However, the Ministry of Defence's Main Directorate of Intelligence (GUR) posted an audio clip on Telegram which it said featured Russian troops discussing setting up the terminals in eastern Ukraine.

"Cases of the Russian occupiers' use of the given devices have been registered. It is beginning to take on a systemic nature," GUR quoted spokesman Andriy Yusov as saying. *—Al Jazeera*

POLAND'S PRIME MINISTER HEADS TO FRANCE, GERMANY

PARIS, 12 FEB

Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk was travelling to Paris and Berlin on Monday in a diplomatic effort to rebuild key alliances as fears grow that former President Donald Trump could return to power in the United States and give Russia a free hand to expand its aggression in Europe.

The meetings on Monday come after Trump shocked many in Europe on the weekend by inviting Russia to invade any NATO member not spending enough on its own defences.

"These comments are irresponsible and even play into Russia's hands," German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said Monday during a visit to Cyprus, remarks carried by the German dpa news agency. "And no one in our alliance can have an interest in that." *—AP*

ISRAELI RESCUE OPERATION

At least 50 Palestinians killed in Gaza airstrikes

RAFAH, 12 FEB

Hospital officials in the southern Gaza town of Rafah say at least 50 people were killed in airstrikes that accompanied an Israeli hostage rescue operation.

Dr Marwan al-Hams, director of the Abu Youssef al-Najjar hospital, said on Monday the dead included women and children. An Associated Press journalist also counted the bodies brought to hospital.

The Israeli military said it rescued two hostages held in the territory in a dramatic raid that was backed up by airstrikes. Israel has been signalling its ground offensive in Gaza may soon target the densely populated city on the Egyptian border.

On Sunday, the White House said President Joe Biden had warned Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that Israel should not conduct a military operation against Hamas in Rafah without a "credible and executable" plan to protect civilians.

Some of those wounded in the strikes had been brought to the hospital.

The Israeli military said it struck "terror targets in the area of Shaboura" -- which is a district in Rafah.

The military statement said the series of strikes had concluded, without elaborating on the targets or assessing the potential damage or casualties. *—AP*

- Dr Marwan al-Hams, director of the Abu Youssef al-Najjar hospital, said on Monday the dead included women and children

Palestinians inspect the damage to residential buildings *Photo: PTI*

'Al Jazeera scribe is a Hamas leader'

Al Jazeera journalist Mohammed Wishah had a side job as a commander in Hamas's anti-tank missile units until 2022, evidence retrieved by the IDF revealed, the IDF's spokesperson for Arabic media, Avichay Adraee, announced on Sunday. "In the morning, a journalist on Al Jazeera, and in the evening, a terrorist in Hamas!" wrote Adraee on X. "During operations by our forces several weeks ago inside one of the Hamas camps in the northern Gaza Strip, a laptop belonging to someone named Muhammed Samir Muhammed Wishah, born in 1986 from Bureij, was seized where it is clear from the documents that Muhammed Wishah is a prominent commander in the anti-tank missile units in the military wing of Hamas." At the end of 2022, Wishah transferred to work in the field of research and development in Hamas' aerial units, according to Adraee. *—Jerusalem Post*

Texas church shooting: 2 injured, shooter killed

HOUSTON, 12 FEB

A 5-year-old child and a man were injured and a woman was killed after she opened fire inside a church here in the US state of Texas, police said.

The violence erupted at pastor Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston on Sunday where a 2 p.m. Spanish service was set to begin.

Two off-duty law enforcement officers- a Houston police officer and an agent with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission -- engaged and struck the woman who entered the massive church with the boy who was later hurt in the shootout.

The woman, roughly 30-35 years old, was wearing a trench coat and a backpack and was armed with a long rifle, Houston Police Chief Troy Finner said.

Lakewood Church -- a building with a 16,000-person capacity that was previously an arena for the NBA's Houston Rockets -- has grown tremendously over the past 25 years since Joel Osteen took over after his father died in 1999 and introduced an upbeat style of Christian televangelism that has captured a following of millions. *—AP*

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

UK plan to send asylum-seekers to Rwanda

LONDON, 12 FEB

The British government's plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda is "fundamentally incompatible" with the UK's human rights obligations, a parliamentary rights watchdog said Monday, as the contentious bill returned for debate in the House of Lords.

Parliament's unelected upper chamber is scrutinising a bill designed to overcome the UK Supreme Court's ruling that the Rwanda plan is illegal. The court said in November that the East African nation is not a safe country for migrants.

Parliament's unelected upper chamber is scrutinising a bill designed to overcome the Supreme Court's ruling *PHOTO:PTI*

The Safety of Rwanda Bill pronounces the country safe, makes it harder for migrants to challenge deportation and allows the British government to ignore injunctions from the European Court of Human Rights that seek to block removals.

Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, which has members from both government and opposition parties, said in a report that the bill "openly invites the possibility of the UK breaching international law" and allows British officials "to act in a manner that is incompatible with human rights standards".

Scottish National Party lawmaker Joanna Cherry, who chairs the committee, said the bill "risks untold damage to the UK's reputation as a proponent of human rights".

"This bill is designed to remove vital safeguards against persecution and human rights abuses, including the fundamental right to access a court," she said. "Hostility to human rights is at its heart and no amendments can salvage it." The Home Office said the Rwanda plan is a "bold and innovative" solution to a "major global challenge". *—AP*

Rupee rises 7 paise to close at 83 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 12 FEB

The rupee appreciated 7 paise to close at 83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, on softness in the American currency and easing crude oil prices. However, weak domestic markets and foreign fund outflows capped sharp gains, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.01 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 82.98 and a low of 83.02.The local unit finally settled at 83 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 7 paise from its previous close of 83.07."We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias, positive global equities and a slight correction in the greenback."However, any bounce back in crude oil prices amid ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and selling pressure from foreign investors may weigh on the rupee at higher levels," said Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. *—PTI*

Gold remains flat; silver jumps ₹400

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Gold prices remained steady at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday, according to HDFC Securities.However, silver jumped Rs 400 to Rs 75,400 per kg from its previous close of Rs 75,000 per kg.Meanwhile, the next tranche of Sovereign Gold Bond scheme opened for subscription at a price of Rs 6,263 per gram. The issue is open until 16 February.The Government of India, in consultation with the Reserve Bank, has decided to offer a discount of Rs 50 per gram less than the nominal value to those investors applying online and making the payment against the application through digital mode."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 63,150 per 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,022 per ounce, down by USD 2 from the previous close.Also, silver was trading marginally higher at USD 22.80 per ounce. Traders avoided directional bets before the outcome of the US consumer inflation data, which can provide more insights about the US Federal Reserve monetary policy path.Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities said that the spotlight also turned to the fourth tranche of Sovereign Gold Bonds. *—PTI*

Coal India net profit rises 17% to ₹9,069cr in Q3

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Coal behemoth CIL on Monday reported a 16.9 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 9,069.19 crore for the December quarter. The company's consolidated net profit stood at Rs 7,755.55 crore in the year-ago period, Coal India Ltd (CIL) said in a regulatory filing.Its consolidated revenue from operations in the October-December period increased to Rs 36,153.97 crore from Rs 35,169.33 crore a year ago.CIL accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal production.*—PTI*

NHPC Q3 net profit falls by 19% to ₹628 cr

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

State-owned NHPC on Monday posted a 19 per cent fall in its consolidated net profit to Rs 628.44 crore for the October-December quarter of 2023-24 due to higher expenses.The hydro-power producer had reported a net profit of Rs 775.99 crore in the October-December period of 2022-23, the company said in an exchange filing.The company's total income also fell to Rs 2,549.69 crore in the quarter from Rs 2,691.34 crore a year ago.Expenses rose to Rs 1,727.85 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 1,303.06 crore in the third quarter of the last fiscal.*—PTI*

Sensex settles at 523 pts, Nifty ends below 21,650

MUMBAI, 12 FEB

PHOTO: X

- In the Sensex pack, NTPC, Tata Steel, SBI and IndusInd Bank were among the major laggards

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed sharply lower on Monday amid a rush for profit taking and mixed trends in global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex settled 523 points or 0.73 per cent lower at 71,072.49. The benchmark touched the lowest level of 70,922.57 during intra-day trade.

The broader NSE Nifty also closed 170.05 points or 0.78 per cent at 21,612.45.

As many as 22 stocks of the 30-share index settled in red while 34 constituents of Nifty50 closed the session with losses.

In the Sensex pack, NTPC, Tata Steel, SBI and IndusInd Bank were among the major laggards.

In contrast, Wipro, HCL Tech, Mahindra & Mahindra and Nestle were among the nine stocks that defied the trend.

BSE smallcap index fell 3.16 per cent while midcap lost 2.62 per cent and largecap closed 0.90 per cent lower.

In Asia, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 closed 0.9 per cent higher and China's Shanghai Composite went up 1.28 per cent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 0.83 per cent.

European markets were trading on a mixed note with CAC 40 of France and DAX of Germany rising, while London's FTSE 100 in the negative.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.50 per cent to USD 81.78 a barrel on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) purchased shares worth Rs 141.95 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

On Friday, Sensex climbed 167.06 points or 0.23 per cent to settle at 71,595.49 points while the Nifty gained 64.55 points or 0.30 per cent to close at 21,782.50 points. *—PTI*

SpiceJet plans to lay off 1.4K people

It is an attempt to reduce strength by 10-15%

MUMBAI, 12 FEB

Crisis-hit SpiceJet plans to hand out pink slips to at least 1,400 employees in the coming days as the airline works to significantly reduce costs and streamline operations of its depleted aircraft fleet, officials said on Monday.

Faced with financial woes, legal battles and other headwinds, the no-frills carrier might ask more staff to leave as there is excess manpower now compared to the number of planes in service. A final decision on the quantum of layoffs is expected this week, one of the officials in the know said.

When contacted, a SpiceJet spokesperson said the airline has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, for achieving profitable growth but did not provide any numbers.

The airline has around 9,000 employees and is now looking at reducing the strength by 10-15 per cent, the official said, adding that layoffs are necessary to reduce the overall costs and annual savings could be up to Rs 100 crore.

A reduction of 15 per cent would mean around 1,350 people will lose their jobs.

The second official in the know said that layoffs are expected across departments and the final list is being prepared. People from the management and consultancy are working on chalking out the contours of letting staff leave, and all the departments have been asked to give their inputs, the official added.

There was no official comment from SpiceJet on the proposed job cuts.

The second official explained that the airline has stopped operations on certain RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme) routes and at those stations, there is excess manpower, especially staff with lower salaries. Relocating such people will be a challenge, the official noted.

Currently, SpiceJet has a fleet of little over 30 aircraft apart from 10 planes that are on wet lease.

"As part of our turnaround and cost-cutting strategy, following the recent fund infusion, SpiceJet has initiated several measures, including manpower rationalisation, aimed at achieving profitable growth and positioning ourselves to capitalise on the opportunities in the Indian aviation industry.

"Through this initiative alone, we anticipate an annual saving of up to Rs 100 crore," the airline spokesperson said in a statement. *—PTI*

Sustained growth in manufacturing sector

Around 85% of the respondents in the Jan-March quarter are expecting a higher number of orders compared to the previous quarter *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

A survey conducted by industry body FICCI revealed sustained and continued growth for India's manufacturing sector in the last two quarters of 2023-24 (October-March).

Compared to the previous quarter, October-December, when 73 per cent of respondents had reported higher production levels, in the current January-March quarter, around 87 per cent of respondents expected either higher or the same level of production.

Responses have been drawn from over 400 manufacturing units from both large and SME segments with a combined annual turnover of over Rs 3.4 lakh crores.

As per the survey, 85 per cent of the respondents in the current January-March quarter are expecting a higher number of orders compared to the previous quarter. Domestic demand conditions also show optimism.

The existing average capacity utilization in manufacturing is around 73 per cent, which reflects sustained economic activity in the sector, which is more or less the same as reported in previous surveys.

The future investment outlook also looks steady, with over 50 per cent of respondents indicating plans for investments and expansions in the next six months.

On the contrary, the availability of raw materials and their escalating prices, uncertainty in global demand, shortage of skilled labour, market volatility, increased power costs, unutilized capacities, and high bank interest rates, are some of the major constraints that are affecting expansion plans of the respondents, the FICCI survey said. *—ANI*

POST-BUDGET MEETING

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das during a customary post-budget meeting in New Delhi on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Vedanta demerger to be done in next 9-12 months

JHARSUGUDA, 12 FEB

- The demerger is subject to a number of approvals from various authorities

Vedanta is working "actively" for demerger of its key businesses, including aluminium, into separate listed companies and the process is likely to be completed in next nine to 12 months, a top official of the company said.

Billionaire Anil Agarwal-owned Vedanta Ltd had last year announced creation of independent verticals through demerger of its metal, power, aluminium, and oil and gas businesses to unlock potential value.

In an interview to PTI, John Slaven, CEO of aluminium business of Vedanta, said, "We are working very actively in securing the successful demerger of the aluminium business."

The process for the demerger is currently underway and is subject to a number of approvals from various authorities, he added.

"We also need approval from our current lenders in the allocation of debt across the various entities that will be separated. So that's playing out at the moment. It's not directly within our hands. So unfortunately I'm not in a position to tell you categorically when it will occur. We are confident that in the next 9 to 12 months the demerger will be completed," Slaven said.

The move, he said, will be an evolutionary step for Vedanta's aluminium business as it will help Vedanta Aluminium to chart out its own course.

About capacity expansion plans for 2024-25, he said that the company will see a significant change in its business because the refinery expansions at Lanjigarh will be effectively completed by the end of next fiscal year.The production at Vedanta's Sijimali bauxite mine will begin in the third quarter of next financial year, he said.

Besides, the company's additional three coal mines -- Kuraloi, Radhikapur, Ghogharpalli -- will start production in about nine to 18 months. *—PTI*

ATMASTCO'S ₹56CR IPO TO OPEN ON THURSDAY

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Engineering, procurement and construction firm Atmastco Ltd on Monday said it will raise a little over Rs 56 crore through an initial public offering that will open for subscription on Feb. 15.

Post the completion of the Initial Public Offering, shares of the Bhilai- headquartered company will be listed on the National Stock Exchange's Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) platform -- NSE Emerge.

The company's IPO is a combination of fresh issue of 54.8 lakh equity and an Offer For Sale of 18.25 lakh shares with a fixed price of Rs 77 apiece, according to a statement.

At this price, the company will mobilise Rs 42.2 crore through the fresh issue and Rs 14.06 crore by way of OFS.

Proceeds from the fresh issue will be primarily used for funding the working capital requirements of the company. Besides, some amount will be used for repayment of loans and general corporate purposes.

The maiden public issue opens for subscription on Feb. 15 and will conclude on Feb. 20.

The Chattisgarh-based company has ongoing projects worth more than Rs 720 crore.

Investors can apply for a minimum of 1,600 equity shares and in multiples of 1,600 equity shares thereafter.

Affinity Global Capital Market Private Ltd is the sole lead manager to the public issue. *—PTI*

APPLE LEADS INDIA TABLET PC MARKET WITH 25% SHARE IN 2023

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Apple led the India tablet PC market in 2023 as well as in the December quarter with a 25 per cent share notwithstanding a decline in its shipments, according to a report.Samsung was at the second spot with a 23 per cent market share in 2023, market research firm CyberMedia Research said on Monday."In CY (in calendar year) 2023, Apple led the tablet market with a 25 per cent market share, followed by Samsung at 23 per cent in CY 2023," CyberMedia Research (CMR) India Quarterly Tablet PC Market Review report said.Apple tablet PC shipments declined by 17 per cent on a year-over-year (YoY) basis. Lenovo occupied the second slot in the December quarter with a 24 per cent market share even as its shipments declined by 3 per cent. Samsung tablet PC shipments grew by 36 per cent on YoY basis, the report stated.The market witnessed a robust 21 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) growth in Q4 2023, driven by strong demand for 5G tablets. *—PTI*

Tata Motor ties up with LeadIT

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

With the collaboration, Tata will be able to harness the power of global best practices to strengthen climate action plans *PHOTO: PTI*

Tata Motors on Monday said it has tied up with the Leadership Group for Industry Transition (LeadIT), a global alliance launched by governments of Sweden and India at the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019.

As a member of LeadIT, the auto major will be able to harness the power of global best practices, influence policy-making, and together with other members strengthen climate action plans, thereby accelerating transition towards net-zero emissions.

"Our pledge to attain net-zero emissions across our Passenger Vehicles (PV) business by 2040, and our Commercial Vehicles (CV) business by 2045, is a testament to our commitment to a greener future," Tata Motors Vice President and Chief Sustainability Officer SJR Kutty said in a statement.

Joining forces with LeadIT propels the automaker closer to these ambitious goals, facilitating a journey towards sustainable transformation, he added.

Sweden's Minister for Climate and the Environment and Co-Chair of LeadIT, Romina Pourmokhtari said the membership signals an important commitment to net-zero from a leading global manufacturer in the supply chain.

"Demand signals are crucial for the transformation of our industry. Fostering dialogues and strengthening partnerships in areas where transition challenges need to be addressed is core to achieving reduced climate emissions," she added. *—PTI*

RBI to issue FAQ on Paytm Payments Bank action this wk

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

To address various issues of customers of beleaguered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL), the Reserve Bank will issue a set of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) this week.

"Wait for FAQ that will have a set of clarifications related to customers of PPBL as our priority is customers should not be inconvenienced. Customer interest and depositors interest is uppermost for us," RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said after the Finance Minister's customary address to the central bank's board.

In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), RBI, on January 31, directed it to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after 29 February.Asked if the deadline of 29 February would be extended, Das said, "Wait for the FAQ.

"Don't expect review of RBI's decision in FAQ. FAQ will address issues related with depositors, customers, wallet users, FASTag holders. Whatever is in the customers' interest that we are dealing in FAQ," he said.

Earlier in the day, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressed RBI's central board of directors.

During the meeting, the Finance Minister highlighted the key thrust areas outlined in the interim Union Budget 2024-25 and the expectations from the financial sector.

The directors complimented the Finance Minister on the Budget and shared their views.

The Union Finance Minister was accompanied by two Ministers of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary and Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, and other senior officials of the ministry, including Finance Secretary T V Somanathan and Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi.The Board also reviewed the global and domestic economic situation and outlook, including the challenges posed by geopolitical developments and global financial market volatility.Deputy Governors Michael Debabrata Patra, M Rajeshwar Rao, T Rabi Sankar, Swaminathan J and other Directors of the attended the meeting. *—PTI*

₹4LAKH CROORE

Procurement from GeM portal to exceed

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

In 2021-22, the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

- Automobiles, computers and office furniture are some of the major product categories

The procurement of goods and services from the government portal GeM will cross Rs 4 lakh crore by the end of this fiscal due to higher buying activities by various ministries and departments, a senior government official said on Monday.The government e-Market (GeM) portal was launched on 9 August, 2016, for online purchases of goods and services by all the central government ministries and departments."As of today, the procurement has crossed Rs 3 lakh crore and going by the trend, the procurement this fiscal will reach Rs 4 lakh crore," GeM CEO P K Singh told reporters here.

In 2021-22, the procurement value stood at Rs 1.06 lakh crore. It crossed Rs 2 lakh crore last year.

Singh said that the share of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) such as Coal India in the total buying of goods and services is increasing at a healthy rate.More than 245 CPSEs, including Coal India, SAIL, NTPC and SBI, are participating in the process.GeM has over 63,000 government buyer organisations and over 62 lakh sellers and service providers offering a wide range of products and services.

Currently, government departments, ministries, public sector units, state governments, and central armed police forces are allowed to carry out transactions through this portal.

Automobiles, computers and office furniture are some of the major product categories.Services, including transportation, logistics, waste management, webcasting and analytical, are listed on the portal. South Korea's KONEPS is the largest such platform in the world.Currently, GeM stands at the third position after Singapore's GeBIZ.

"GeM's expansion into the services sector has played a pivotal role in driving its accelerated adoption. Services sector contribution in the total procurement has increased from 23 per cent in 2021-22 to 50 per cent this fiscal," Singh said. *—PTI*

Saurabh Tiwary to retire from professional cricket

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Left-arm batter Saurabh Tiwary has decided to retire from professional cricket after Jharkhand's final league match of the Ranji Trophy against Rajasthan in Jamshedpur from 16 February. In a career spanning 17 years, Tiwary represented Jharkhand and played three ODIs for India and turned up for four IPL franchises. "It's a little tough to bid farewell to this journey that I had started before my schooling," the 34-year-old was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo. "But I'm also sure that this is the right time for this. I feel that if you're not in the national team and IPL, it's better to vacate a spot in the state side for a youngster. Youngsters are getting a lot of chances in our Test team so I'm making this decision." Tiwary scored 49 runs in the three ODIs that he played for the country in 2010. *—PTI*

India signs off without a medal from Shotgun WC

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Ganemat Sekhon and Munek Battula finished 12th in the final skeet mixed team event on Monday as India ended their campaign at the ISSF Shotgun World Cup in Rabat, Morocco, without a medal. The duo shot a combined score of 140 after three qualification rounds each as the USA topped with 149. A second Indian pair, Abhay Singh Sekhon and Areeba Khan shot 134 to take 17th place. Italy was at the top of the medal tally, sweeping all four golds on offer before the skeet mixed team final. *—PTI*

Sangram Singh to face Pakistan's Muhammad Saeed

MUMBAI, 12 FEB

Making his comeback after six years, former Commonwealth Heavyweight champion Sangram Singh will face Pakistan's Muhammad Saeed in what will be the headline event of the International Pro Wrestling Championship on 24 February in Dubai. The event carrying a prize purse of Rs 3-crore will have a lineup of five matches, including the one featuring Sangram and Saeed. "This sport of wrestling exemplifies gentlemanly conduct, and I aim to inspire the youth through this event keeping in mind the ideology of FIT India," said the 38-year-old who won the Commonwealth Heavyweight Championship in 2015 and 2016. "Competing against Muhammad Saeed, who is an elite athlete in his own right will be the perfect way to emphasize that age is no barrier and I look forward to a great fight to complete my anticipated comeback facilitated by World Professional Wrestling Hub." *—PTI*

Nagal jumps 23 places to break into top-100 of ATP

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

India's leading singles player Sumit Nagal on Monday jumped 23 spots to break into the top-100 of the ATP singles rankings for the first time in his career. The win at the Chennai Open challenger event on Sunday pushed Nagal to 98th in the latest singles rankings led by Serbian Novak Djokovic. Last month, Nagal had become the first Indian to beat a seeded player at a Grand Slam in 35 years when he upset then world no.27 Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan in the first round. He eventually lost to China's Juncheng Shang in the second round. Nagal is the first Indian to feature in the top-100 since left-handed Prajnesh Gunneswaran made the cut in 2019. *—PTI*

Sébastien Haller scored late to lead host nation Ivory Coast to a remarkable Africa Cup of Nations title with a 2-1 victory over Nigeria in the final on Sunday. Haller fired in from close range in the 81st minute to complete the turnaround after Franck Kessié drew the Elephants level in the 62nd. It was Ivory Coast's third title after wins in 1992 and 2015, both won on penalties. Veteran Ivory Coast midfielder Max Gradel, now 36, was part of the 2015 championship team *PHOTO: X/CAF*

Arg beat Brazil 1-0 to secure spot at Olympics

Luciano Gondou scored the winner for Argentina

CARACAS, 12 FEB

Brazil will not defend its Olympic men's football title in Paris after losing 1-0 to its regional rival Argentina on Sunday.

In the decisive South American Olympic qualifier, Luciano Gondou scored the winner for the Argentina under-23 team coached by Javier Mascherano. He headed a cross from Valentin Barco past goalkeeper Mycael in the 78th minute at the Brigido Iriarte Stadium in Caracas.

Brazil won gold at men's football in the Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo Olympics.

South America's Olympic qualifying for men's football offers two spots in Paris 2024, with the remaining berth to be decided later Sunday when Paraguay and Venezuela face off.

Argentina's Luciano Gondou celebrates after scoring the opening goal against Brazil the match *PHOTO: PTI*

Argentina finished its final group stage campaign with five points in three matches and cannot be overtaken by the other teams.

Argentina had the upper hand in the first half but the defensive stance of Brazil, coached by Ramon Menezes, didn't help bring much emotion to the match. World Cup winner Thiago Almada hit the post in the 16th minute.

Argentina's Leandro Brey made the best save of the game in the 61st, when substitute Gabriel Pec struck hard from close range. Brazil did not keep up the pressure, with striker Endrick once more playing below par. And then Gondou's header made the difference between the two teams.

"We deserved this. We didn't lose a single match at the qualifying," said Gondou, who scored four goals in the tournament in Venezuela. "We suffered, we waited for this goal, but at the end we got it." Brazil last failed to make the men's football Olympic tournament in 2004.

"It is a very bad feeling, we prepared well for this," Brazil midfielder Andrey Santos said. "We struggled to keep the ball throughout the tournament. It didn't go as we expected."

Argentina won the gold at men's football at the games in Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008, with Lionel Messi leading the team in Beijing. *—AP*

Women's hockey team suffers 1-2 loss to China

ROURKELA, 12 FEB

The Indian women hockey team's disappointing run in the FIH Pro League continued as it lost 1-2 to China here on Monday.

India took the lead in the seventh minute through Sangita Kumari's field goal but China equalised in the 14th minute through Gu Bingfeng (penalty corner), who scored his second goal of the match in the 53rd minute through a penalty stroke.

India had lost to China by the same 1-2 margin in their earlier match on 3 February in Bhubaneswar. India earned five penalty corners in the match -- as against four by China -- but as is their wont, they could not convert a single one. The two sides were locked 1-1 at the end of the first quarter. Sangita gave the finishing touches after receiving a pass from Vandana Katariya. Just a minute before the end of the first quarter, Bingfeng smashed the ball past India captain and goalkeeper Savita Punia in her second PC attempt.

The next two quarters did not produce any goal from both sides. China enjoyed greater ball possession in the second quarter but the Indian defence was resilient in not allowing the visitors to connect the dots and take the lead.

With about 10 minutes left in the second quarter, China were awarded a penalty corner but Savita made a fine save.

The Indians immediately mounted a counter attack and found themselves with an opportunity to score courtesy of another penalty corner. *—PTI*

IND VS ENG: 3RD TEST

KL Rahul ruled out of third Test, Padikkal gets a call

RAJKOT, 12 FEB

Senior India batter KL Rahul was on Monday ruled out of the third Test against England after failing to fully recover from his quadriceps strain that forced him to miss the second match in Visakhapatnam. Devdutt Padikkal, the talented Karnataka left-hander who is enjoying a great first class season, replaced Rahul in the squad.

"KL Rahul, whose availability for the remaining three Tests was subject to fitness, has been ruled out of the third Test against England in Rajkot. Mr. Rahul has reached 90 per cent of match fitness and is progressing well under the supervision of BCCI Medical Team," BCCI said in a press release. Rahul will continue his recovery at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru as he looks to return for the fourth and fifth Test.

The selectors had earlier named both Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja in the squad subject to clearance from the BCCI's medical team. "Rahul hasn't yet reported in Rajkot. Ravindra Jadeja, the local boy has linked up with the team. It was always a case of subject to fitness and BCCI medical team is still not confident that he is match fit," a senior BCCI source told PTI on the condition of anonymity.

In his most recent Ranji Trophy match, the 23-year-old Padikkal scored 151 with the chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar watching his knock from the stands. Padikkal has been in excellent form this season. Having started with a 193 against Punjab in the opening game, he struck 103 against Goa.

Besides his exploits in Ranji, Padikkal also scored 105, 65 and 21 in his three innings for India A in the two unofficial Tests against England Lions. Coming back to Rahul, he extended break raises a serious question about whether the senior India players and BCCI's medical team are giving proper picture about the injury status of certain players. *—PTI*

Devdutt Padikkal, the Karnataka left-hander who is enjoying a great first class season, replaced Rahul in the squad *PHOTO: PTI*

In Virat's absence, great chance for Eng'

CAPE TOWN, 12 FEB

Former pacer Stuart Broad says the ongoing India-England Test series is the most evenly-matched contest that he has seen between the two sides but the visitors have a strong chance of emerging triumphant as the "fire, passion and competitiveness" of Virat Kohli is missing from the home team's arsenal. Speaking to PTI on the sidelines of the just-concluded SA20, where he was a commentator, Broad said the absence of Kohli due to personal reasons is a downer but the matches so far have been engrossing. The five-match series is locked 1-1 and the two teams will now square off in the third game in Rajkot, beginning 15 February.

"(The) first two matches were very competitive and it is one of the most exciting India-England Test series that I have seen. It is the most level series," he said. "India won the last Test but England's playing style ('Bazball') is quite effective in India. With Virat not in the team, it is a great opportunity for the England team," he added. "The battle between Virat and England bowlers had been great in the past. (James) Anderson and Kohli's battles are quite famous. It's a shame for the series and the sport that he will be missing," he observed. *—PTI*

DEFENSIVE MISTAKES KILLING US: XAVI ON BARCA'S 3-3 DRAW

NEW DELHI, 12 FEB

Following FC Barcelona's 3-3 draw against Granada in La Liga on Monday, the Blaugrana head coach Xavi Hernandez said that their "defensive mistakes" are costing them a lot of points.

While speaking at the post-match press conference, Xavi said that they have to start playing for a win from the very first minute of the match to take an early lead.

"Defensive mistakes are killing us. Costing us a lot of points. We have to go for the game from the first minute and even more so when you go ahead early on," Xavi said, according to FC Barcelona website.

The head coach added that the players at Barcelona are "angry" just like the fans. He also said that the 3-3 draw against Granada was a "step backwards". "Going forward we created a lot but bad errors at the back mean we are behind Madrid and Girona. A point is not enough. The players are angry, like the fans.

Xavi said they are still hoping to win La Liga *PHOTO: X/BARCA*

It's an opportunity lost and we were not up to the job, it's a step backwards," he added.

He added that they are still hoping to win La Liga even when the head coach knows that it will be difficult.

"The goal is not to throw in the towel. We are not giving up the league up but we know it is difficult. The day against Villarreal we conceded five, today three...it makes it difficult if you want to compete and win things. We had played well in the last two games and we had worked hard on defensive aspects," he added.

The Catalan club had to share points following a 3-3 draw against Granada on Monday. After splitting points, the Blaugranas stand at the third place in the La Liga standings with 51 points after winning 15 of 24 matches. *—ANI*

Ramkumar begins Indian challenge on winning note

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

Wild card Ramkumar Ramanathan fought back from a set down to pack off Frenchman Maxime Janvier 6-7(4), 7-5, 6-4 and advance to the second round of the Bengaluru Open here on Monday.

The 29-year-old Indian kept his nerves despite his serve being put under pressure in the opening two sets by his higher ranked opponent to pull off a sensational victory in two hours and 26 minutes to give the home crowd a lot to cheer.

Also biting the dust on the opening day of the main draw was Croatian third seed Duje Ajdukovic, who went down against Tunisia's Moez Echargui 6-2, 6-4 in an hour and 30 minutes.

But the main attraction of the opening day was clearly the face-off between Ramkumar and Janvier and the former rode on home support to make a winning start to his campaign. *—PTI*

INDIAN DAVIS CUP PLAYERS FELICITATED AT B'LURU OPEN

BENGALURU, 12 FEB

The Indian Davis Cup team, which defeated Pakistan resoundingly on their turf recently, was felicitated during the inauguration ceremony of the Bengaluru Open 2024 at the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association Stadium in Bengaluru.

The main draw of the tournament was inaugurated by Manjunath Prasad, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Youth Empowerment and Sport, Karnataka, in the presence of chief guest R Ashoka, President Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association and Leader of Opposition, Legislative Assembly of Karnataka.

"It's a proud moment for the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association to have Davis Cup stars participating at the Bengaluru Open 2024. Their achievement in Pakistan was historic and inspiring. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to the entire team for their remarkable victory in this historic match and we look forward to celebrating many more successes in the future," said R Ashoka, according to a Bengaluru Open release.

The Indian team thrashed Pakistan 4-0 to secure their place in the Davis Cup World Group I earlier this month. The members of the winning team Ramkumar Ramanathan, Sriram Balaji, Saketh Myneni and Nikki K Poonacha were present at the felicitation ceremony and they will also feature in the ongoing tournament. *—ANI*

Weissenhaus challenge: Gukesh loses to Caruana

WANGELS, 12 FEB

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh fumbled again and went down fighting against world number two Fabiano Caruana of United States in the first game of the quarterfinals in the Weissenhaus Freestyle Chess challenge here.

Gukesh had a slight advantage in the middle game against Caruana but that slipped off quickly and the American Grandmaster pounced on his opportunity thereafter to take the full point home. The game lasted 39 moves. With just one game under the classical time control, Gukesh needs to win the return game to stay in contention to go to the semifinals. After three losses under rapid time control, this was Gukesh's fourth straight loss in the event.

When Alireza Firouza of France scored an upset victory over world number one Magnus Carlsen of Norway, Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan made most of his chances to beat world champion Ding Liren of China. Alirezaa won a pawn against Carlsen in the middle game and then efficiently converted in to a rook and pawns endgame. *—PTI*

FOCUS ON MEN'S TEAM

Sindhu leads India's pursuit of glory at BATC

SHAH ALAM, 12 FEB

Thomas Cup champions India will look to recreate magic when they chase the elusive crown at the Badminton Asia Team Championships, which will mark the return of double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu from injury.

The Indian men's team, which lifted the Thomas Cup in 2022 and secured a first-ever silver medal at last year's Asian Games, will look to go all the way in the continental event this week after finishing with bronze medals in the 2016 and 2018 editions.

The women's team, led by Sindhu, got the rub of green as China is the only other team in Group 'W' *X/BATC*

It won't be a walk in the park for the Indian men's team, who will face formidable China and Hong Kong in its group A league matches. However, India, led by HS Prannoy, Lakshya Sen and inform doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, will back themselves to finish in the top two and make it to the knockout stage.

The women's team, led by Sindhu, got the rub of green as China is the only other team in Group 'W' and India are thus already assured of a knockout berth.

It will be an uphill task for the women's team, which will depend on Sindhu and the two doubles pairs -- Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treesa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand and Guwahati Masters 2023 champions Ashwini Ponnappa-Tanisha Crasto to provide them the push.

For Sindhu, the event assumes extra significance as she will look to test her match fitness and regain confidence after being missing action since October last year.

The 28-year-old had suffered a knee injury at the French Open and took some time to regain her fitness and then shifted her base to Bengaluru to train under mentor Prakash Padukone at PPBA. *—PTI*